STREET & SMITH'S

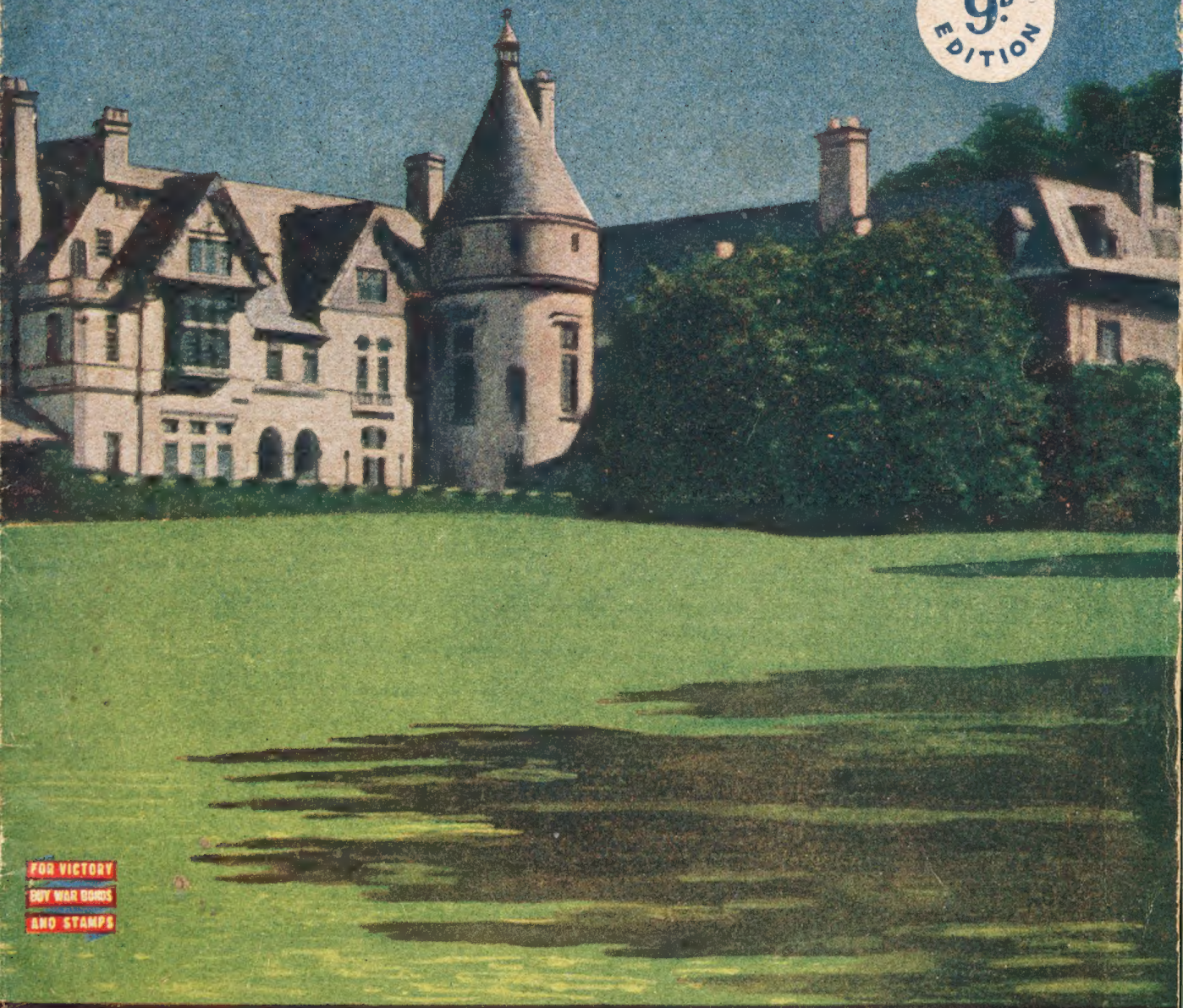
MAY - 1944

DETECTIVE

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

STORY MAGAZINE

BRITISH 9d. EDITION

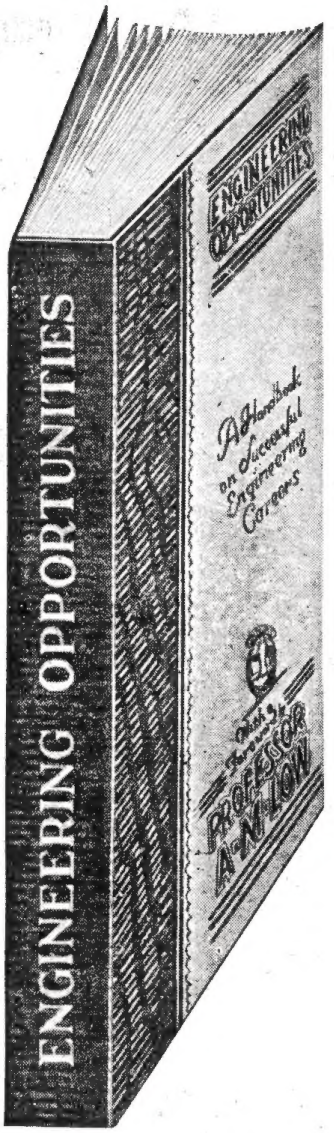


FOR VICTORY
BUY WAR BONDS
AND STAMPS

THE SHADOW IN THE TREES

A SHORT NOVEL BY MAUD McCURDY WELCH

AMBITIOUS ENGINEERS



HAVE YOU HAD *YOUR* COPY OF "ENGINEERING OPPORTUNITIES?"

Whatever your age or experience—whether you are one of the "old school," or a newcomer to Engineering anxious to hold your position in the more difficult days of peace—you must read this highly informative guide to the best paid Engineering posts.

The Handbook contains, among other intensely interesting matter, particulars of **B.Sc., A.M.I.C.E., A.M.I.Mech.E., A.M.I.E.E., A.M.I.A.E., A.M.I.P.E., A.M.Brit.I.R.E., CITY AND GUILDS, CIVIL SERVICE** and other important Engineering Examinations; outlines courses in all branches of **CIVIL, MECHANICAL, ELECTRICAL, AUTOMOBILE, RADIO, TELEVISION, AERONAUTICAL and PRODUCTION ENGINEERING, DRAUGHTSMANSHIP, GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT, BUILDING (the great after-war career), "R.A.F. MATHS.," MATRICULATION,** etc., and explains the unique advantages of our Employment Department.

WE DEFINITELY GUARANTEE "NO PASS — NO FEE"

If you are earning less than £10 a week, you cannot afford to miss reading **"ENGINEERING OPPORTUNITIES"**; it tells you everything you want to know *to secure your future* and describes many chances you are now missing. In your own interests we advise you to write for your copy of this enlightening guide to well-paid posts NOW—**FREE.**

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

319 SHAKESPEARE HOUSE, 17, 18 & 19 STRATFORD PLACE, LONDON, W.1

THE B.I.E.T. IS THE LEADING INSTITUTE OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD

STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

TITLE REGISTERED U.S. PATENT OFFICE

The editorial contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and cannot be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

MAY 1944

Contents

Short Novel

THE SHADOW IN THE TREES. Maud McCurdy Welch 33

Nurse Alma Toland returns to Marlsgate to find death and murder stalking the corridors of the hospital.

Novelettes

THE COWBOY AND THE LUGER Julius Long 2

A Nazi makes a big mistake in his calculations.

THE COPPER KNIFE . . . . Dorothy Dunn . . . 14

The mystery of a strange government expedition is solved with the help of Chief Manu.

Short Stories

TELL 'EM, PAGLIACCIO! . . . Fredric Brown . . . 26

Pop, the ex-clown, finds himself starred with a bull elephant in the biggest role of his lifetime!

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE—. . Ethel Le Compte . . 57

It was only a faint imprint on a pillow, but it told the chief all he wanted to know.

PETE GARLAND'S WIDOW . . James M. Ross . . . 62

The underworld takes care of its own in life and death—

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

THE COWBOY AND THE LUGER

A NOVELETTE

By JULIUS LONG

A Nazi spy didn't calculate a cowboy would know how to handle anything meaner than a six-shooter —but that's where he made his big mistake.

I.

DONIGAN took a full five minutes in the hotel shower, for he had found that a thousand miles in even the most luxurious streamlined train is something else besides a heavenly hop. He had thought himself patriotic when he had refused to let Tom Hopper, his boss, pull the wires that would have gotten him airline passage. Now he wondered if his inexperience had contributed substantially to his patriotism.

The hotel bed looked soft and wonderful, but Donigan dressed dutifully. Then he called Maxwell's home. Someone there told him Maxwell was still at the plant. When he called the plant, they told him Maxwell had gone home. Donigan went down to the lobby and left his key at the desk.

"Would you have any idea where J. D. Maxwell spends his evenings?" he asked the clerk. He thought it possible that the habits of J. D. Maxwell would be generally known, for his truck-body factory was the largest industry of Limaville, a city of only forty thousand.

"I might," said the clerk with the air of one who knows all the answers. His thin nose had a larcenous bend. Donigan dropped a five dollar bill beside his key. "Your best bet is Perry's Tavern," the clerk said quickly. "Maxwell plays there a lot and spends heavily. He can afford it since the war started. His plant runs day and night."

Donigan considered the information of dubious value. He decided, however, to give it a test, though the prospect of spending the rest of the night with a playboy manufacturer was not pleasing. As he left the desk, a short man, who appeared to be a traveling salesman rose to his feet.

"Say, cowboy, tell me where you got that hat! Boy, that's somethin'!"

In the past twenty-four hours Donigan had discovered that his wide-brimmed Stetson, conservatively modeled for Texas, was an object of curiosity in the North. He smiled good-humoredly at the man.

"I bought this one at Epstein's in Fort Worth."

The little man regarded the hat with frank admiration.

"Boy, I wish they were wearin' 'em around this part of the country! I'd like to wear a hat like that, only I can just hear my wife yellin', 'ride 'em cowboy!" the minute I'd walk through the front door!"

Donigan laughed with the little man and went out into the street. The hotel lacked a doorman but there was a cab stand, and a cab surged forward at his gesture.

"Perry's Tavern."

It was about what he had expected, a boxlike building garish with neon lights. Its position, just outside the city limits, gave it the advantage of a large parking lot, but only a few cars occupied it. Donigan regarded his watch as he left the cab. It was half past ten—still early, but late enough for a larger crowd than this.

When he spied the imported car he felt that the trail was hot. It was the kind of car Maxwell would drive. Eagerly he entered the night club.

They looked him over at the door. A hat-check girl reached eagerly for the Stetson.

"Gee, cowboy, I'll take good care of this one! Mind if I try it on?"

Donigan said that he didn't mind. The girl was tilting the hat on her head and gazing ecstatically at herself in a vanity mirror as he turned and surveyed the night club. A six-piece band was playing for dear life, but only two couples were on the floor. The tables were so sparsely occupied that Donigan knew he would have seen Maxwell had he been there. He walked to the bar, seated

himself on a stool and ordered a drink. Almost immediately, the adjoining stool was occupied by an attractive brunette whose makeup marked her as a showgirl.

"Hello, cowboy!"

"Hello," said Donigan.

"I saw your cowboy hat when you came in," the brunette explained. "You don't look like a rodeo cowboy. I've a hunch you're the real thing!"

Donigan grinned.

"I'm just a white-collar cowboy. I never get thrown from anything but a desk.'

The fact, which Donigan did not care to dwell upon, was that he had grown up on Tom Hopper's Three-Bar Ranch, one of the largest cattle ranches in Texas. He would still be roping steers, he knew, if Hopper hadn't financed a commercial course at college and afterward promoted him to manage the ranch.

"I think you're kidding about the white-collar part," the brunette said, her gaze admiring Donigan's swarthy tan. "My, what shoulders! You make all the horse-opera heroes look anæmic."

"That calls for a drink," said Donigan. The brunette ordered Bacardi in a coke, and Donigan's sensibilities were less outraged when he observed that the bartender only pretended to put the rum into the glass. The petty larceny merely amused him, and he concentrated on the brunette's lovely profile.

Her name was Eleanor Neal. She was from Rochester. She said she had studied ballet dancing and voice and was working in the floor-show line until she got her chance. Donigan believed the part about her voice for it was very nicely modulated. After the first round of drinks he casually asked:

"Are you acquainted with J. D. Maxwell, the manufacturer? I'm told he comes here often."

"Yes. I've met Mr. Maxwell, but I don't know him well. He was here only ten minutes ago."

She observed Donigan's frown of disappointment.

"You were looking for him?"

"Yes. I don't suppose you have any idea where he was going?"

"No, I don't. I just remember seeing him leave with another man."

"Can you tell me what kind of car Maxwell drives?"

"It's a big one; light gray, almost white. It's the only one like it around."

The imported car in the parking lot outside had been light gray, almost white.

"Thanks for the information," Donigan said. "I'm afraid I'll have to be on my way. It's very important that I find Maxwell tonight."

Eleanor Neal looked disappointed.

"Well, before you go, may I have another drink? The boss has his eye on me right now. He's complained lately that I don't help the bar enough. That's not fair, for there's no rum in these cokes, so they're virtually all profit."

Donigan laughed and ordered another round. He observed a sallow, almost completely bald man wearing a frown of proprietary annoyance.

"Your boss?"

Eleanor Neal glanced in the direction of his gaze and nodded.

"Frank Perry, night-club impresario, in person. He's sourer than usual tonight because the house is exceptionally poor. Maxwell's leaving so early was a blow.

Donigan slid from his bar stool.

"That reminds me of my duty."

"Can't you stay and catch the show? I'll start in half an hour."

"Sorry, some other time. Right now I've got a job to do."

He retrieved his hat and walked from the night club. Outside, a single cab waited. Donigan instructed the driver to take him to his hotel. As the cab drew away, he observed that the light-gray car was still in the lot. Maxwell had probably gone in the other man's car

He had no intention of making any further attempt at finding Maxwell. His pretext had merely furnished a graceful excuse for not remaining with the beauteous Eleanor, and getting himself plastered. He would need a clear head in the morning when he had it out with Maxwell.

Something had to be done about the refrigerator-truck bodies that Tom Hopper had ordered many months before. The Three-Bar needed those trucks to fill a huge army beef contract. It wasn't merely the loss of his contract that worried Tom Hopper, it was the realization that the army did need his beef and it wouldn't get it without those long-overdue trucks.

"I hate even to whisper sabotage," he had told Donigan. "But the fact is I'm getting suspicious. I never did like the looks of that Uhlman, Maxwell's chief engineer. He's supposed to be a refugee from Germany, and he may be the cause of the delay."

"Why not call in the F.B.I.?" Donigan had asked.

"Because for twenty years I've done business with Maxwell and I don't want him to have a government investigation on his hands. You've met him and you know what a nice guy he is. The government might even take over his plant. I want you to go up there and give him a chance to straighten this thing out himself."

So Donigan had gone to Limaville to present Maxwell with an ultimatum. He could either supply the trucks pronto, or the F.B.I. would find out why.

The cab was crawling. It was a converted passenger car with no glass partition, and Donigan leaned forward.

"Can't you drive any faster?"

"Gotta save tires and gas," the driver answered. "Regulations, you know!"

Donigan sank resignedly back in his seat. The trip from the night club to his hotel consumed at least forty-five minutes. Wearily, Donigan stopped at the desk for his key.

"Find your man?" asked the clerk.

"No. Just missed him. Thanks, anyway."

A pimply youth operated the single elevator car in use. He sent it slowly upward.

"Saving your tires, too?" Donigan asked, and when the youth turned a blank face he added, "Skip it."

He opened the door of his room, found the light switch and snapped it. Then he stared.

The object of his search, the man he had come a thousand miles to see, awaited him in his own room! He sat rigidly in a chair, and his eyes stared into Donigan's own eyes as if they were weary from waiting. Donigan saw, however, that their expression was deceptive.

J. D. Maxwell was dead!

He had to be, Donigan knew, when he saw the hole in Maxwell's smart, double-breasted business suit. Blood had seeped into the cloth about the hole, but there was no longer any seepage. Donigan moved forward, seized a limp wrist and verified his first grim impression.

He moved almost instinctively to the telephone. The police should be notified at once. His every act would be noted with suspicion for he was a stranger in the city, and the dead man was in his room. It was fortunate, he reflected, that he had an easily provable alibi.

His hand hesitated as it was about to grasp the phone's receiver. He turned, walked back and stared at the hole in the cloth of Maxwell's suit. The hole could have been made only by a .44 or a .45. Donigan crossed to his luggage and opened his Gladstone. He felt relief when he found his gun was still in its holster.

It was a huge gun, a .44 frontier model revolver with single action. Donigan liked to carry it with him because it reminded him of his father, who had been a Texas Ranger. It was nice to have the gun around. Donigan lifted the gun from the bag and fondly removed it from its holster.

He examined the cylinder. A cartridge had been fired. Donigan realized that he was trembling. He held the barrel to the light. Ordinarily, the barrel was shiny with oil. Now the barrel was very dry and slightly blue. It smelled of powder.

Donigan tried to think calmly. He replaced the revolver in its holster, reflecting that nothing could be more natural than the presence of his own fingerprints on his own gun and that to wipe it clean might destroy the prints of the murderer.

That the murder had been committed in his room was probable. He surveyed the room carefully and found nothing out of place. A heavy woolen blanket was folded neatly at the foot of the bed. Donigan strode to the bed, picked up the blanket and let it fall open. Its inside was seared and torn. Donigan dropped the blanket, convinced that it had been used to silence the blast of the .44, and that in all probability no one outside this room had heard the fatal shot.

The confirmation of his hunch did not afford him satisfaction. Ruefully, he realized that the time he had spent in establishing the fact that Maxwell had been killed by his own gun in his own room amounted to evidence against him. He had an alibi until the moment when he had entered the room, and he should have notified the police at once. He moved to the phone, aware that he had already been alone with Maxwell's body long enough to have killed him.

The desk man answered. Donigan tried to speak calmly.

"This is Donigan, Sam Donigan, of Texas. You probably remember the cowboy hat."

Donigan was exultant when the clerk replied: "Oh, yes, Mr. Donigan, I remember you."

"That's fine. I have to make out a report for my company, and I'd like to know what time it was when I came in. My watch has stopped."

The latter statement was an insult to the fine old silver timepiece which Donigan carried. He examined the watch, even as he spoke. It was eleven to twelve.

"Really, Mr. Donigan, I don't know whether I can tell you what time it was or not. I've been so busy all evening, and—"

"Yes, I know," Donigan interrupted. He could not keep the impatience out of his voice. "But it was just a few minutes ago when I came in. You must recall asking me if I'd found my man—Maxwell."

"I do remember the incident, Mr. Donigan." There was a pause in which the clerk seemed to be racking his brain. "Really, I'm sorry I can't be specific about the time. I don't think it was before eleven. Perhaps—"

"Of course, it wasn't before eleven!" Donigan snapped. "Your memory is better than that! I haven't been here more than ten minutes at the most!"

"Really, Mr. Donigan, I'm terribly sorry I can't help you. If I'd only known it was so imp—"

Donigan hung up. Perspiration moistened his face. He knew that the clerk's failure of memory was not accidental. It was by design. It had to be. This hotel, the Limaville House, was admittedly the city's leading hotel. Yet, it was a small hotel, and its night clerk had not been too busy ten minutes ago to remember Donigan's arrival.

He abandoned the telephone. He turned off the lights, stepped from the room and locked the door behind him. He shuddered. A traumatic image of the dead man seated beyond the door had flashed before his eyes. He was slightly unsteady as he moved away, then he traversed the length of the corridor in long strides. He signaled for the elevator.

Seconds elapsed, then the car halted, and the doors opened. Donigan stared at the operator and demanded:

"Where's the elevator boy who just brought me up?"

The elevator "boy" who now stood at the car's controls was a man of more than thirty with narrow-set eyes.

"The other operator has left, sir. I came on duty at eleven."

Donigan started to protest, then said nothing. He stepped into the car. Its operator regarded his hat with frank curiosity as he stopped the car at the lobby. Donigan crossed to the desk and dropped his keys.

"Going out again, Mr. Donigan? I'll try to remember when you come in next time!"

"I'm sure you will."

Outside in the street, a cool breeze engulfed Donigan like the cold stream of a shower bath. Out here was reality. In there, in the hotel, was unreality. The dead body of a man Donigan had traveled one thousand miles to see. A hotel clerk with a corrupt memory. A strange elevator man who had not been there when he said he had been.

"Taxi, mister?"

Donigan moved wordlessly down the street. He walked without sense of direction, without conscious plan. He was outside that accursed hotel, but in what way was that an accomplishment? Sooner or later the body would be discovered in his room, and his departure from it would make him appear the worse. Ruefully, he reflected that his every act had been anticipated. Even his panicky departure from his hotel had been planned, and it would seem like what it was—flight!

A cruising cab slowed, and Donigan, acting on a sudden inspiration, hailed it. He had recalled the cab which had brought him from Perry's Tavern, and though he remembered little of the cab save that it was a converted passenger car, and nothing whatever of its driver's appearance, he felt a ray of hope. If he could only find that cab driver he would get the corroboration of the alibi he so desperately needed!

"Perry's Tavern," he told the cruising driver. The possibility was strong that the cab he sought was an independent with a stand at the night club. As the cab rolled away a police cruiser halted before the Limaville House, siren silent.

Donigan took a deep breath. They hadn't given him much start. He didn't have to be told that Maxwell's body had been discovered, that in a matter of seconds he would be the object of a police search. Well, he had been cold-decked but he would have to play out the hand.

The trip to Perry's Tavern required only fifteen minutes.

Donigan spotted what he thought was the cab he sought. He eagerly paid his driver, crossed to the other. Somehow, he managed to recognize a face which had no distinguishing characteristic except an unpleasant plumpness. The man sat at the wheel of his cab and, as Donigan approached, he grunted a greeting that suggested familiarity.

"You remember me, do you?" Donigan asked.

"Couldn't very well forget a guy with a hat like that!"

For the first time Donigan considered that as a fugitive wanted for murder the Stetson marked him as elaborately as a placard!

"When," he asked steadily, "did you drop me at my hotel?"

The driver seemd to reflect.

"Must've been around eleven or a little before."

"You are mistaken. It was eleven-thirty or a little after."

The driver shook his head obstinately.

"Couldn't've been! I had a haul out to the east side, and that takes time. Couldn't've got back here by now if it'd been eleven-thirty when I dropped you at the Limaville House."

Donigan measured his words.

"You are a liar. You never made such a haul. You're covering up the fact that you deliberately stalled an extra thirty minutes driving me to my hotel. Come clean—who paid you to lie?"

A flush of anger mounted on the cab driver's plump face. His right arm reached to his side as he swung open the door. When he stepped out he held a heavy wrench.

"This is one thing that wasn't in the cards!" Donigan thought as he swung a haymaker from his heels. The plumpness of the cab driver's jaw did not help his knuckles much, but he had the satisfaction of seeing the man collapse to the ground. He had the further satisfaction of feeling that the man would remain there for some time.

But that was all. The cab driver's bald lie had blasted the last remnants of his alibi. He was sure that the time of Maxwell's death would be determined as having been between eleven and eleven-thirty. The testimony of the hotel clerk, the elevator man and the cab driver would put him in his room at that time.

His eyes fell on Maxwell's car, still in the lot. Maxwell had left Perry's Tavern with another man—the showgirl, Eleanor Neal, had told him that!

Hope, virtually extinguished, flared again in Donigan's heart. If he could only talk to the girl, learn the identity of the man who had left the night club in company with Maxwell! Perhaps she could give him the lead that would save him. It wasn't too much to go on, and he fairly raced into the night club.

The floor show was in progress. Donigan felt instant anxiety. Would the cops find him before he could contact the girl?

"Hello again, cowboy! Aren't you going to give me another crack at that hat?"

Donigan ignored the hat-check girl. Hat on head, he moved forward among the tables. Scarcely one-fourth of them were filled, and a comedy act was dying without an encore. A master of ceremonies told a nasal joke, and the ladies of the line took over for the finale.

Donigan remarked that Eleanor Neal was easily the most graceful dancer among the half dozen girls on the floor. Her supple figure, costumed in what appeared to be a couple of bandannas, would have absorbed his attention at any other time. His gaze shifted apprehensively about the room.

A sallow face held his attention. Frank Perry, the proprietor of the establishment, also seemed interested in his presence. The man's eyes shifted quickly after Donigan spotted him, then he moved with exaggerated casualness down the side of the room and disappeared through a doorway.

Donigan tensed. Maxwell's murder, the frame-up which had been plotted against him, both had centered about two points, the hotel and this night club. It was from here that Maxwell had been summoned to his death, it was here that the nefarious cab driver operated. Donigan's suspicions were overpowering; he felt positive that the night-club proprietor had gone to phone the police.

The police radio would trap him before he could talk to Eleanor Neal!

"May I show you to a table, sir?"

Donigan brushed aside the waiter who had questioned him. The fact that so few tables were occupied enabled him to reach the floor quickly. In two strides he was in the center of the dancing line of girls.

"Beat it! Scram!"

It was one of the girls who mistook him for a drunk. A startled look of recognition was visible on Eleanor Neal's face as she first beheld him. He reached out, grasped her wrist and drew her firmly from the line.

"You fool!" she cried. "Are you crazy? What are you doing?"

She struggled so vigorously that Donigan had no alternative but to pick her up, carry her amidst the tables to the front entrance. He managed to accomplish this without

"Let me go!" the girl cried. "You're ruining the show!" She struggled so vigorously that Donigan had no alternative but to pick her up, carry her amidst the tables to the front entrance.

interference, for all the people present seemed incapable of any reaction other than open-mouthed astonishment.

"Let me down!" the girl persisted. "You're ruining the show! Perry'll have you jailed for this!"

Donigan laughed without humor.

"Perry's already taken care of that!"

He carried her outside then, unimpeded. The cab which he had disdained for flight seemed very convenient now. Its driver still lay much in the shape of a large sack of potatoes. Donigan carried his burden to the other side of the cab and flung open the door.

"Get inside!" he snapped.

Eleanor Neal slapped him across the face.

"You're either drunk or crazy or both. You'd better beat it before they catch up with you. Look, someone's coming now!"

It was true. Two men were fighting their way through the gaping crowd that blocked the night-club entrance. Donigan did not hesitate. He thought he was socking the girl lightly, but she folded up almost before he could catch her. He lifted her into the cab and climbed in over her.

He thanked his lucky stars that the cab was of standard make. He got it out of the lot just as the two men reached him, shouting. He turned away from the city limits and gave the cab everything it had. A mile from the night club he turned into an intersection. No one had given pursuit.

The girl slumped in the seat beside him whimpered, uttered a few inarticulate words, then straightened up quickly.

"You hit me!" she cried. "You knocked me out! I'll have you arrested for assault and battery and kidnaping!"

"That might scare me pink," Donigan said, "if I weren't already wanted for murder."

"Murder!"

The girl had been shrinking from him before, but now she got as far away from him as was physically possible.

"You must be mad!" she breathed. "Isn't murder enough? Why are you kidnaping me?"

"Look, I don't like the term," Donigan protested. "I'm not kidnaping you. I'm merely taking you away from Perry's Tavern long enough to ask you a few questions. I had to drag you out of there before your boss, Frank Perry, had gone to a phone to turn me in to the police. A fine fellow, this Perry! He's one of the gang that's trying to frame me for Maxwell's murder!"

"Maxwell!"

Donigan turned at her startled cry. She had clapped a hand to her mouth.

"Yes, J. D. Maxwell, the manufacturer. When I got back to my hotel room, I found him there, dead. He had been shot with my gun. I found I didn't have an alibi when the hotel clerk and elevator operator lied about the time I got back. So did the driver of this cab, who took me there. I thought my chances were hopeless until I remembered that you had seen Maxwell leave with someone else. I want you to tell me who that was."

"I won't! I won't help a murderer! If you don't take me back this minute I'll add a kidnaping charge to what you're already up against!"

"I'll not let you go until you tell me. There's no reason why you shouldn't. Even if you think I'm guilty, you should tell the truth about who was with Maxwell. You'll eventually have to tell the police, anyway. If you tell me now I can do something about it before I'm caught."

For some seconds Eleanor Neal was silent.

"Take me back first and then I'll tell you."

Donigan was relieved. She did know!

"That's no good. You'll have to tell me first."

"I won't." She seemed to be debating with herself. "If you didn't kill Maxwell, who did? You were looking for him!"

"Of course I was. Whoever murdered Maxwell and framed me for it knew that I was looking for Maxwell and advertising the fact. I had a good reason to look for him, but not to kill him."

The markers of a main highway intersection loomed in the cab's lights. Donigan turned into the highway taking the direction back to the city.

"Where are you taking me?" the girl demanded.

"Nowhere, in particular. We'll just ride around until you become reasonable and tell me what I want to know."

He reduced the cab's speed to a leisurely pace.

"Well?"

"All right," Eleanor Neal begrudgingly relented. "The man with Maxwell was Karl Uhlman, the one—"

"The German who's chief engineer of

Maxwell's plant!" Donigan's excitement mounted. "Tell me," he demanded, "did Uhlman get a phone call just before he and Maxwell left?"

"Why, yes."

Donigan snapped his fingers.

"I've got it! It all checks perfectly! The clerk at my hotel tipped off Uhlman that I was on my way to see Maxwell. Uhlman got Maxwell to leave, took him to my hotel and killed him. On top of that he framed me for the job!"

"Now I know you're crazy!" Eleanor Neal scoffed. "Uhlman is the last man on earth who would have killed Maxwell! Maxwell's told us all about Uhlman. He was a famous engineer in Germany until a couple of years before the war started. He fled from the country when he saw what was happening. He was broke and friendless when Maxwell heard about him and gave him a high-salaried position. That's the man you say murdered his benefactor!"

Donigan shook his head.

"It had to be Uhlman. My boss suspected that he wasn't a fugitive from the Nazis, but one of their agents slowing down production in Maxwell's plant. Well, my boss was right. Maxwell must have found out. Uhlman murdered him to avoid discovery."

"How," asked Eleanor Neal with obvious scorn, "are you going to prove anything like that?"

"By finding Uhlman! I'll get a confession out of him if I have to take it out of his hide!"

Eleanor Neal was unimpressed.

"First, you can keep your promise and take me back. I've kept my part of the bargain, now you keep yours."

"Sorry, but I can't. I'd hoped that you'd be able to describe the man with Maxwell, but I hadn't hoped that you would be able to identify him. If I let you go now you'll tell your story to the police, and they'll get to Uhlman before I do, probably to protect him!"

"Why, you double-crosser! You won't get away with that! I'll scream the moment we're near anyone. Hitting me again won't do you any good because I'll still make enough noise before you can stop me!"

Donigan shook his head regretfully.

"I'd hoped I wouldn't have to do it, but I guess there's no other way." He slowed the cab. "This looks as if it's as good a place as any. I can leave your body over there in that grove!"

Eleanor Neal gasped.

"I knew you were a killer! Why did you pretend you weren't? Why don't you say it? You're going to kill me!"

Donigan shrugged.

"Well, you won't go along quietly."

"I will, I will. Please believe me! I take back everything I said. I'll stay with you until you want to let me go! Even like this!"

Donigan had forgotten how very much undressed the girl was. A scanning glance refreshed his memory with a jolt. His momentary triumph in frightening her into submission was spoiled. By now every police cruiser and cop in Limaville would be on the lookout for him in a stolen cab. They would also expect to find him accompanied by a scantily attired chorus girl.

Ditching the cab would be easy, but Eleanor Neal was another problem.

He couldn't sock that tender chin again and ditch her along with the cab. He knew that; in fact, he didn't even consider doing it. But he was equally aware that he couldn't drag her around the way she was. Suddenly he got an idea that he knew was crazy, but he hung onto it because he knew his predicament was so desperate that he couldn't throw away an idea merely because it seemed crazy.

He demanded: "Where do you live?"

"The Gibson. It's a hotel downtown. Why?"

"Shucks! I thought maybe you lived in a rooming house." He still toyed with his crazy idea. "I suppose there's no way we could get into your hotel without being seen."

Eleanor Neal gasped at the idea.

"Like this? I wouldn't walk through that lobby of traveling salesmen for a million dollars!"

"I didn't mean that. I thought maybe there was a back entrance to the hotel."

"There's only one way in or out, the front. They keep the back locked so none of the guests can get careless and leave without paying their bill. It's that kind of hotel."

"It surely has a fire escape. That kind of hotel usually has one on the outside."

"I think it has. Yes, I know it has. There's an old iron fire escape that you can reach at the end of the corridor."

"Then we'll use it." He saw that she was baffled and hadn't got his crazy idea at all. "I'm taking you to your hotel," he explained. "I'm taking you there so you can

get your clothes. If we don't look like an ordinary couple, while I'm looking for Uhlman, we'll be picked up surely."

He heard the girl give a relieved sigh.

"But don't get any ideas!" he warned. "At the first peep out of you, I'll let you have it!"

The girl said nothing. Perhaps she was sure she could manage to attract help when they got to her hotel. Maybe she would, but it was a chance Donigan had to take. When they were well inside the Limaville city limits, he said:

"You'll have to show me how we get to the Gibson."

"From here? I'm as much lost out here as you are! You'll have to get downtown before I can give you any directions."

II.

DONIGAN felt his way through the city's deserted streets. He took no chances. If the lights of any car showed ahead or in his mirror he turned into a cross street. Occasionally, he worked his way completely in the wrong direction, fooled by some clump of neighborhood business buildings, but finally he found himself in a built-up section that was unmistakably the fringe of the down town district.

"Well? Do you know where we are now?"

"I'm sorry. I'm still lost."

Donigan was suspicious. Was she trying to get him to drive around the middle of town till he ran over some cop? Somewhere a siren sounded. The sound receded, but Donigan didn't feel any too good about it, for it merely reminded him that they were hunting for him everywhere. The instinct of the hunted gave him a razor-edge alertness, and when he spied the formidable outline of a patrolman roaming his beat, he whirled the cab into an alley so quickly that he was sure it had not been seen. At least there was no whistle.

He slowed cautiously at the next intersecting street. It was a main thoroughfare, for he was almost in the heart of town now. An exclamation came from Eleanor Neal.

"This is it! The Gibson's in the next block. That's the back end of it there—the alley takes you right behind it!"

Donigan made out the dark outline of a hotel building. Sure enough, there was a fire escape on the side.

He darted the cab across the street and reached the back of the hotel. There was a narrow alleyway between it and the next building. The alleyway was cluttered with garbage cans and boxes of refuse, but Donigan managed to squeeze the cab between them without stirring up a clatter. He halted under the fire escape.

He got out and looked up at it. There was a ladder at the bottom landing, but it was high off the ground. Donigan looked inside the cab, where Eleanor Neal crouched.

"Look here, I'm going to have to climb on top of the cab to reach the ladder, but don't think you can get away. I'll shoot you down like a coyote!"

He turned away to conceal an irrepressible grin. Then he climbed upon a fender, the cab's hood and finally its metal top and drew down the iron ladder.

"O.K.," he told the girl in the car. "You go first."

He hadn't realized how very much undressed she was until she started to climb the ladder. When they reached the first landing, he said: "What floor do you live on?"

"It's only one more flight. I'm in 315."

They ascended another flight. The window giving access to the third-floor landing was amply wide, but it was locked.

"If they have burglar alarms it's all over," Donigan thought. Then he kicked in the windowpane and opened the window. "Watch for the glass!" he said. His warning was a command which Eleanor Neal obeyed by preceding him into the corridor. He was right after her.

Mentally, he crossed his fingers as they moved through the corridor, for rightfully the breaking of the windowpane should have awakened everyone on the floor. They reached the door of 315 without discovery. Eleanor Neal exclaimed:

"My key! I don't have my key!"

Donigan twisted the knob. The door was locked all right. He backed up against the opposite wall, turned his left shoulder toward the door and prepared to lunge.

"You'll make an awful racket!"

"The people in this hotel are used to it!"

He was all set to let go when the door abruptly opened. A man stood in the doorway. He watched Donigan with the malicious amusement he might have felt if he had caught someone admiring himself in a mirror. The man had a thin nose that

Donigan recognized. He was the hotel clerk of the Limaville House.

"Won't you come in, Mr. Donigan. Again, I welcome you to the Limaville House!"

His forced smile of perfunctory greeting vanished. Then Donigan understood. The wall decorations, the carpeting were all the same. This floor was in his own hotel, the Limaville House!

"I'm waiting, Donigan!"

It was a command. The hotel clerk held an automatic pistol with manifest competence. He stepped back to permit Donigan to enter, but the effectiveness of the automatic was unimpaired.

Donigan glanced over his shoulder at Eleanor Neal. She avoided his eyes. He entered the room.

It was not a hotel bedroom into which he stepped. Steel filing cabinets gave the room the appearance of an office and a massive executive desk facing the door gave it the stamp of an important one. Behind the desk sat the little man whom Donigan had thought was a traveling salesman when he had stopped Donigan in the lobby.

"Well, I'm a monkey's uncle, if you're not still wearing that hat!"

It was true! Donigan felt himself crimson to his heels. He might as well have carried a placard bearing the legend: "Wanted for murder!" Oh, well, he thought, wearing the hat was a minor stupidity compared to the colossal imbecility of letting Eleanor Neal trick him into bringing her here! And he had thought that he had been forcing her by his bluff!

She had followed him into the room and she dropped into a leather lounge chair. The hotel clerk closed the door after them and stood squarely in front of it with his automtaic leveled at Donigan.

Donigan thought that the man behind the desk, who appeared to be in charge of things, would certainly compliment the girl upon her stratagem of getting him here, but the look upon the man's face was vehement as he snarled:

"You fool! Bringing him here, of all places!"

The girl's eyes were weary, but resentment smoldered in them.

"What else could I have done? I couldn't get away from him! You didn't warn me he was going to burst into the club like a madman and kidnap me! And besides, you never told me Maxwell was to be murdered! I was just to kid this fellow along at the bar and give you a chance to get Maxwell out of town. When he told me about the murder I didn't know what to do."

The man grimaced his contempt.

"You must have slipped up somewhere. Why the devil did he drag you out of Perry's?"

The girl briefly told her story without once lifting her eyes from the thick carpeting of the room. When she had finished the man's thin lips were curled in sardonic amusement.

"So he was hunting Uhlman!" The shrewd eyes turned on Donigan. "Well, cowboy, I'm afraid you were on a cold trail. Uhlman couldn't do you much good even if you found him!"

Eleanor Neal stirred in her chair.

"What do you mean?"

"Uhlman is dead."

The girl paled.

"You . . . you—"

"Yes. But don't be alarmed. The coroner has already returned a verdict of suicide. It was quite obvious. Uhlman drove his car at a high rate of speed into the side of a freight train. It is conceded that the death of his great benefactor, Maxwell, was too much for him, and he chose that way out."

A gasp escaped from Eleanor Neal's lips. She seemed to be rigid in her chair.

"I am annoyed," said the man, "at your squeamishness about the necessary elimination of the enemies of the Reich. Uhlman was a very dangerous enemy who prevailed upon Maxwell to abandon the cause."

Donigan had listened with a bewilderment that he made no attempt to conceal. The little man regarded him and his amused contempt returned.

"Yes, cowboy, you were chasing the wrong man! It was not Uhlman who was responsible for the slowdown at Maxwell's plant. It was Maxwell himself. He handled it quite simply—he merely discharged his most competent foreman and skilled laborers.

"He was valuable not only for the work in his own plant, but for his work among other manufacturers, for whom we provided entertainment at this hotel and at Perry's Tavern. It would amaze you, cowboy, to know how many believe that production should be slowed down so that America's all-out participation in the war will be prevented and the way will be paved for a negotiated peace."

The man's laugh was hideous.

"It is the most subtle form of sabotage. When a munitions plant is blown up, Americans become angry. When the production of goods is merely slowed, they become disgruntled. Der Fuehrer, powerful as he is, can never defeat an angry America. He can destroy only a stupid America!"

Donigan uttered his first words since entering the room.

He said: "It took you a long time to say something worth remembering."

The man colored.

"I am sorry that I have been boring you. After all, I did not ask you to come here. It was your own idea. If Eleanor hadn't made her stupid blunder of letting drop the fact that Maxwell had not left Perry's alone, you would have been in jail by now. It was really superb, the frame-up I designed for you. Your bringing a six-shooter was a stroke of luck I hadn't counted on."

As if thinking of something that he should have remembered before, the man opened a drawer of the desk and produced an automatic pistol of impressive size and design. He examined the pistol carefully and with evident satisfaction.

"Even this pistol has not the stopping power of your six-shooter," he observed frowningly, "though it has more muzzle velocity and range. I doubt if you have ever seen a gun like this before. It is the Parabellum. It— Oh, I forgot, it is not referred to by that name in this country. In America it is known as the Luger."

It was with seeming difficulty that the small man brought his thoughts from the pistol which he fondled affectionately.

"Uhlman was our only problem. Despite his efficiency, he could not be fired, for his employment in the body plant established Maxwell as a superpatriot. To have killed him would have been to invite investigation. But tonight we had to take that risk, which should be slight, however, as the accident in which he met his death was most realistically contrived.

"You see, he had found out much about us and the work Maxwell was doing on our behalf. As we had begun to suspect, there was a leak in our organization." The man smiled at Eleanor Neal and bowed from his hips. "I congratulate you, Miss Uhlman! We never should have suspected that you were Karl Uhlman's daughter if we had not chanced upon your photograph in his watch case. Of course, your hair was blond when the picture was taken, but the photography was excellent."

Donigan stared. It was true! Eleanor Neal—Uhlman, rather—sat rigidly in her chair, her face visibly pale despite its heavy theatrical make-up. She was working with him after all!

"Tonight when we learned your identity, Mr. Donigan, we knew that you were heaven-sent. Uhlman had gone to Perry's Tavern and threatened to expose Maxwell if he did not discontinue the sabotage at his plant. Maxwell possessed one weakness so common to Americans. He yielded. It was necessary to eliminate both men.

"To have accomplished their joint removal by an accident would have provoked suspicion. I selected that fate for Uhlman, but chose you to bear the guilt for Maxwell's murder. It was so simple. Shrecker, the hotel clerk here, phoned Uhlman and said that he was you, the representative of an important customer.

"Uhlman was told that you wished to see Maxwell and him at once, at the hotel. The call was directed to Uhlman because Maxwell had met you and knew your voice. We were ready for the pair when they arrived. I leave the rest to your imagination." He paused and regarded the desk clerk at the door. "Go now, Shrecker, and get Otto from the elevator. We have work to do."

His eyes were upon Donigan now and he held the Luger as if it were part of his hand.

"And now, Mr. Donigan, I am afraid our little visit must end. Your body and Miss Uhlman's will be found in the wreck of the cab in which you kidnaped her when you were wanted for the murder of the late great Maxwell, whom you killed in anger over an argument about some truck bodies."

Donigan's answer was to take a step forward. The muzzle of the Luger came up sharply.

"I advise you to attempt no liberties with this pistol!" the Nazi snapped. "This isn't any six-shooter in a cowboy horse opera! You can't put it out of action by the time-worn trick of jumping upon it and grabbing the cylinder. This gun has no cylinder—it has a magazine holding eight cartridges. I warn you that I am quite familiar with its operation. I carried it four years as a machine gunner in the last war."

Donigan took still another step forward.

"You dare not shoot me," he said. "A bullet wound will not fit into a faked accident!"

The man's lips curled derisively.

"Take another step and find out!"

Donigan dared not take another step. He edged slightly forward, however. He was still two feet from the broad top of the desk. The small man watched him as a cat watches a mouse, confident he would not try to tackle the Luger.

Donigan leaped at the Luger. The fingers of his right hand closed on the slot of the Luger's receiver. He squeezed with all his might. The Nazi also squeezed, but he could not pull the trigger. The Luger was forced to the left. For a brief second it was pointed at the girl in the chair. Too frightened to move, she stared into the muzzle of the Luger as if hypnotized.

Still the Luger did not fire.

Donigan swung with his left. His dwarf-like opponent crashed backward. The Luger fell from his hand. Donigan grabbed it. He was changing his grip when the door opened behind him.

Otto, the elevator boy, was the first to enter the room. Only Shrecker, behind him, had a gun. He tried to aim past Otto's shoulder. Donigan had to fire from his hip. The Luger kicked back violently as it belched its slug. The slug almost went wild, but not quite. It struck Otto just above his left eyebrow. The back of Otto's head narrowly missed Shrecker as it spun against the corridor wall behind.

Yellow flame came from Shrecker's automatic. Donigan's Stetson flew off his head. Donigan could have fired even sooner if he had cared to try another shot from his hip. The first shot had flicked a hot cartridge case into his eye. He lifted the Luger and aimed carefully. Then he squeezed the trigger and Shrecker was slammed back against the corridor wall. He slumped to the floor and lay still.

The Nazi stirred at Donigan's feet, and Donigan brought the Luger's barrel down upon his skull. He, too, lay still. Donigan retrieved his Stetson, which would never again keep out the rain.

" You'd better call room service," he told Eleanor Uhlman. "There are some awful messes up here."

They watched the train of flatcars bearing Tom Hopper's trucks. The train pulled slowly out of the Maxwell plant yard, and when the last car had cleared the yard gate, Donigan climbed into the sedan in which Eleanor Uhlman sat with the F.B.I. man.

"Well, that's that."

The F.B.I. man handed Donigan a wrapped parcel.

"Before I forget it here is a little gift. You should appreciate it—we had to pull all kinds of wires to be able to give it to you. Rightfully, it should have been confiscated."

Donigan lifted the parcel.

"The Luger!"

"Yes. It's a war souvenir; probably the only one you'll ever get, since your job raising beef keeps the army from accepting you."

Eleanor Uhlman interestedly regarded the parcel.

"There is something that I've meant to ask you. I've been so busy answering questions that I've had no time to ask any myself. I want to know why I'm still alive, why that Luger didn't go off when it was pointed right at me."

Donigan hesitated embarrassedly.

The F.B.I. man grinned and explained: "The Luger didn't go off because Donigan got the tips of his fingers into the slot in the receiver and held the trigger bar tightly so that it couldn't release the firing pin. It had the effect of putting the gun on safety. It was a hell of a chance for him to take—getting his fingers into the slot before it went off—but it was his only chance. Where he picked up that trick with a Luger is beyond me."

"From my father," Donigan said embarrassedly. "That six-shooter wasn't the only gun he left me—there was a Luger that his C.O. let him bring back from France after the first World War. I guess I wasn't supposed to know anything but six-guns, so Adolf's little missionary was a little overconfident."

The F.B.I. man was studying the look in the girl's eyes. He decided that the Luger would not be Donigan's only souvenir of the present world war.

* * * * * *

THE END

* * * * * *

THE COPPER KNIFE

A NOVELETTE

By DOROTHY DUNN

If it hadn't been for Chief Manu, the secret of the copper-knife killings would have remained a mystery of this strange government expedition.

I.

BRICK STAFFORD bent his red head over the Moundville Hotel register and signed his name below Eric Humboldt's.

"Connecting rooms?" asked the clerk.

"Yes," answered Eric.

"How long will you be staying? The permanent rate—"

"Not that long. The government has sent us here to open the Tabler Mound. Mr. Stafford is my assistant. It may be a long job or a short one, but we stay until it's finished."

The clerk looked surprised.

"It has been years since—"

"I know, but this is a special case. The new flying field for training cadets makes it necessary to level the mound."

A listless porter propped a broom against the wall and came to the desk for their bags. Then he ran the elevator up to the third floor and led them down a threadbare carpet to the corner "suite."

Brick Stafford surveyed the room with some amusement.

"The beds look comfortable anyway—lots of brass around the edges, but no visible mattress bumps."

"After a day's work on the mound, you'd be able to sleep on the floor, my boy!"

"Guess you're right, sir. It's my first real work in the field and I certainly appreciate the chance. Lucky for me that the university chose you instead of Richard Ames."

Eric Humboldt was past fifty and his dignified bearing, his precise speech and his gray hair commanded respect. The students in his archaeology classes were always surprised to find the brilliant professor as immaculate as a bank president. Somehow, one expected an archaeology teacher to carry the musty mould of his subject about his person.

"I'm worried about Ames," confided Eric. "He was so sure he would get the assignment because of his seniority. It was a great disappointment to him—so much of a blow that I asked Hartley to send him down to help."

"But won't he resent your supervision?"

"It may be a little awkward at first, but once we get down to the relics. I'm sure Richard will be too interested to care who's in charge."

"I hope you're right," said Brick, frowning a furrow into his freckled forehead.

"Give the old man a chance, Brick. In his day, he was a pretty fine instructor."

"Maybe so, but he's not so much as a man. An egocentric, I'd say."

"There are worse things," said Eric, placing his toilet articles neatly on the dresser. "But we can forget Richard Ames for a while. We start at five o'clock tomorrow morning, so I'm going to turn in early. You'll have to see the town on your own tonight."

"Then let's eat now."

The Cahokia lunchroom was the best that Moundville could offer and the dinner was much better than the outward appearance of the place led them to expect.

As soon as Brick saw the girl behind the counter, he whispered to Eric. "Recommended by Duncan Hines!"

"Food or the girl?" asked Eric, amused at his young assistant's sudden enthusiasm.

"Both, if her fair hands did the cooking! Suppose she's as nice as she looks?"

"I'll leave you to find out. See you in the morning."

There were ten stools in the lunch counter, but after Eric's departure, Brick was the only customer. The blond girl with the peaches-and-cream complexion was busy scraping off the grill.

Brick cleared his throat.

"May I have another glass of water?"

She gave him a fresh glass and turned away. Perhaps a more direct approach—

"What's your name?" asked Brick with an engaging smile that wrinkled his freckled nose.

"Florence Brown," she said rather coldly.

"Well, look here, Florence. I'm Brick Stafford, a stranger in Moundville, and I thought maybe—"

The door slammed and a thin, sleek-looking man swaggered up to the counter. Acts like the owner, thought Brick, although the neat, dark suit the man was wearing was well tailored and could never have been bought from the proceeds of the "blue-plate special."

"About ready to close up, baby?"

Florence looked flustered. "Sorry, Jack. I told you I wouldn't come."

"Sure, but you didn't give a reason. There has to be a reason for saying 'no' to Jack Knight, baby. Come on, hop out of the apron."

There was a flash of defiance in Florence's violet eyes—not anger, just a sort of courageous rebellion.

"My reason is sitting right there. I'm going out with this young man." She motioned toward Brick.

"Who the hell are you?" asked Knight, regarding Brick critically.

"I'm the man who takes Florence out tonight—let it go at that." Brick was smiling inwardly at the ace fate had just dealt him.

Florence intervened. "Excuse me. Jack Knight meet . . . er . . . Mr. Stafford.

Brick got off the stool and gave a mock bow. At least she had remembered his name.

There was smoldering anger in Knight's eyes, but his voice was deadly cold. "Stranger in town?"

"Yes."

"What are you here for?"

"None of your business."

"Everything in this town is my business."

"Politician?"

"In a way."

Brick looked at Knight's long fingers, a gambler's hand. There was a sprawling country club east of Moundville that had a reputation like Monte Carlo and Jack Knight looked like gambler's dough.

"You put things together fast for a stranger. Now, what brought *you* here?"

Brick laughed. "Nothing I have to keep secret. I'm here with an order to level the Tabler Mound. The government is extending the new flying field."

Knight's face contorted in sudden fury. "What do you know about the Tabler Mound?"

"More than most people, I imagine. It's a burial mound, peculiar to the Mississippi Valley region. It's thirty-five feet high and the mound people—"

"I didn't ask you to recite," snapped the swarthy gambler. "You sure you're doing this for the government?"

"My boss, Mr. Humboldt, has the order. Our workers roll in with the equipment tomorrow. What do you care?"

Jack Knight shrugged, but there was a peculiar look on his face.

"It's your funeral, Stafford, if you want to dig the grave. Why don't they extend the field in the other direction? A lot of people in this town like the Tabler Mound just as it is."

"It's easier to level the Mound than to fill in the Kaskaskia River. People will just have to get over their attachment for the hill."

Knight went to the door without a backward glance at Florence and his parting words rang in Brick's ears like a threat: "If you go on with your plans, you'll find that it's more than a sentimental feeling that this town has for the Tabler."

At nine-thirty, Florence closed the diner and Brick waited outside. Some waitresses look worse when they change into street clothes, but Florence hit a new high in smartness in her simple print dress with its wool redingote. Brick had an eye for detail and he decided that this girl had a refinement of manner and dress that didn't jibe with the lunchroom.

"You didn't need to wait," explained Florence. "I just had to give some excuse to Jack. Thank you for playing up and good night."

"Not so abruptly, please. Let me walk home with you. After all, I may be around for a month or so!"

Florence smiled, relaxing a little. "You don't know what you're letting yourself in for. I live two miles out, near the Tabler."

"Just a step, and the night was made by Romberg himself! Spring is a hell of a nice thing when the stars are big and glittery and when the girl—"

"Lives two miles away," laughed Florence.

They walked past the poolroom and past the Moundville Hotel and then left the few scattered frame houses behind. The last

house was a farm and Florence turned down a dirt road just beyond. Without the natural brilliance of this special night, it would be a pretty dark stretch.

"Aren't you afraid, walking out here alone?" asked Brick.

"I know every fence post by name and darkness is nothing to be afraid of."

"Yeah, but what about the things in the darkness?"

"With most people, they're imaginary things. I've never felt afraid, so don't get me thinking about it now."

"Not for the world, but it gives me a very good excuse for protecting you while I'm here. Want to tell me about Jack Knight? He made some funny cracks about the Mound."

"Don't let Jack bother you—that's just his way of talking. He's not a dangerous character."

"But you wouldn't go out with him. Does he frighten you?"

"Of course not. We went to the same high school. But he takes too much for granted and I want to put a stop to that."

Florence's explanation of Knight's behavior sounded simple enough, but Brick was remembering the gambler's face when the Mound had been mentioned. The fury he'd shown hadn't been acting. Brick had the feeling that, if anything, Knight had made an effort to conceal his agitation rather than play it up.

"He said something about other people objecting to the excavation. Was that just silly talk, too?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Stafford. There are certain people—"

"Call me Brick and then go on."

She laughed. "All right, Brick. I know of one person who is going to be very much upset when your men start digging—my Aunt Alycia."

"You joking?"

"I wish I were."

They had reached Florence's gate and Brick looked up with surprise. The iron grille was early French and the yard was landscaped. The house was partly concealed by shadows, but he could see enough of it to know that there were at least fifteen rooms and that the architect must have worked from a generous budget.

"Rich girl?"

"Poor as the lunchroom. The house belongs to Aunt Alycia and she's about all my parents left me except the money I invested in the diner."

"But if she supports a place like this, can't she support you, too?"

"You might as well know, Brick—you'll learn it sooner or later—my Aunt Alycia is —well, rather eccentric. That means two things. She believes that she has the power to make spirits materialize, and she's very tight with her purse strings."

"What do you mean by 'spirits'? Does she think she's a medium?"

"Not exactly. It's just a mild form of hallucination. She believes that she has talked to, and has seen, the Mound people who built the Tabler. It gives me the creeps to hear her describe the Mongolian chief!"

"Florence, it's not nice for me to butt in on such short acquaintance, but no form of hallucination is mild. Don't you think you ought to—"

"Shut her up in an institution? No, Brick. She's been that way for ten years and sometimes she's very rational and sweet. I'm fond of her. Those spells last only several days at a time."

"You're not afraid of the dark, not afraid of spirit-conjuring and have the nerve to insult a man like Jack Knight! What kind of a girl are you? Isn't there anything that scares you?"

Her smile was as dazzling as the beauty of the night, and the sound of her voice was rich. The scent of jasmine was heavy on the air.

"I'm afraid of two things if it will make you happier to know my weakness. The Indian curator at the Mound Museum and nice young men with red hair who ask too many questions."

She vanished up the shadowy path and Brick was glad she left so quickly. The perfume of the jasmine, the magic of the night, and the strange loveliness of Florence Brown began to weigh on his heart with a heavy longing. His arms were outstretched toward the retreating girl in a subconscious gesture and he felt a little silly when he discovered himself in the pose of a romantic opera tenor about to back offstage. But he felt quite happy as he turned toward town.

He had taken only about six steps, however, when a small white figure glided out of a thicket and stood before him.

"A moment, young man."

"Yes?"

"I am Alycia Carvis."

Brick wished he could turn up the button on the moon to third-speed lighting. He could only get a blurry idea of Aunt Alycia's

appearance. Her white flannel coat was cut high at the neck and the raglan sleeves bulged loosely to the waist where the coat was belted in tightly. Her hair was either platinum or gray and her eyes gleamed as phosphorescent as a cat's in the dark.

"Yes, Miss Carvis."

"I heard you talking to my niece. I don't like the things you said. You were making fun of my sensory contact with the other world."

"I'm sorry, Miss Carvis, but the idea of speaking to the dead seems fantastic. I'm Brick Stafford, by the way."

"You are going to destroy my Tabler Mound?"

"Not destroy, just excavate."

"I can't let you! It will break my contact with Chief Manu."

Brick wondered whether this were one of Aunt Alycia's rational days. Her words were queer, but there was something sane and composed about her bearing and the pitch of her voice.

"My superior, Professor Humboldt, has a government order. I'm sorry."

"I shall see that Professor Humboldt does not touch my Mound, young man. I would rather die than lose the spirit voice of Chief Manu!"

It was six o'clock the next morning when Brick opened his eyes. He jumped out of bed in a guilty panic.

Eric was sitting in the deserted lobby reading the newspaper when Brick made his appearance.

"Sorry I'm late, professor. Why didn't you call me?"

"Thought I'd let the sleeping dog lie! Our trucks were delayed by a washed-out bridge over the Kaskaskia. Tom phoned that they wouldn't get in until noon."

Brick slumped into an old leather chair and pulled the ash stand up to the arm.

"Some beginning! But we can do a little ground work, can't we?"

"Sure, but there's no hurry. I had a wire from Richard Ames. He turned his classes over to Winters and is coming in this morning."

Brick turned an affectionate glance toward Eric.

"In a way, I'm glad Ames is coming. There's some local trouble brewing over the opening. I've been warned by two people that you'll have to give up the whole idea."

Eric grinned. "When you've been digging as long as I have, you'll learn not to pay any attention to the objectors."

"This is different," said Brick thoughtfully. "I know a real threat when I hear one. I have a feeling that you could level any of the other hills without drawing a peep from anyone. But the Tabler gets an unusual rise out of a couple of bad characters."

"It would sound better over a cup of coffee," said Eric, getting up from the chair to his full, dignified six feet.

They went across the street to eat and Brick described the objections he had encountered.

"They meant it," said Brick when he finished.

The professor laid his knife and fork neatly on his empty breakfast plate and lighted his pipe.

"It's a crazy story, Brick. Aunt Alycia doesn't worry me, but Chief Manu sounds like an interesting person. For years, I've been trying to piece together enough information to determine who the Mound builders really were. The theory of a Mongolian race coming across the Bering Straits and being driven farther south to the fertile Mississippi Valley is just a theory. Chief Manu could save us a lot of guessing!"

"Maybe I'm wrong, professor, but I think if you had heard the intensity of Alycia's voice, you wouldn't take her as a joke."

"Dangerous people don't make threats, Brick, they act. But Knight puzzles me. What interest could he have in a historical burial place?"

"You've got me there. Another thing. Do you know of an Indian curator of the Mound Museum?"

Eric laughed. "I know Kinchie very well. He's a full-blooded Seminole from Florida. He received some recognition for his work on the Shell Mounds on the Florida Keys. The Bureau of American Ethnology recommended him for this post. He's been here for years."

"That doesn't make sense. Why would Florence be afraid of him, if he's all you say?"

"You can't put stock in what women fear. She probably doesn't know the reason herself."

Brick didn't press the point, but he knew that Florence must have a very good reason for her aversion to Kinchie. But it was no good thinking about it.

Later that morning, Richard Ames arrived. Brick was glad to see him. If trouble came, an ally would be valuable.

"Glad you came, Richard," said Eric cordially.

They shook hands and Brick noticed how soft Ames looked. The size of his paunch, added to a natural barrel chest, made him an unattractive figure in spite of his fine head and scholarly brow. His lips were too thick, but a heavy gray mustache partly hid this imperfection.

"We're going out to photograph the exterior this morning," continued Eric. "Want to come, or do you feel like resting up from your trip?"

"Rest, my eye!" said Ames. "I don't want to miss a thing. I have my movie camera; thought I'd film each stage, get each terrace and each artifact just as you find it."

"Illustrated lecture tour?" asked Brick, pleased at the congenial tone of the man.

"That's the idea, son. If you strip to the waist and let that curly red hair shine forth on my color film, it'll look mighty good to the women's clubs!"

Brick couldn't quite grasp the change in Ames. Maybe he reserved the sour-puss stuff for the classroom and broke down to a human level when he left the campus.

By ten o'clock the Tabler Mound had been photographed from all angles and the men stopped to rest.

From the platform top, Brick could see the sprawling house of Alycia Carvis within walking distance. He pointed it out to Eric.

"That's Alycia's hut, professor. Wonder if Chief Manu has told her that we're standing on top of him right now!"

Eric gave Richard Ames a laughing account of both threats and Brick was relieved to see that Ames took the local angle seriously. His heavy lips were drawn together.

"It wouldn't do any harm to take a few precautions, Eric. Chief Manu may be more than an illusion."

"Nonsense, Richard! You don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

"Not exactly, but I've run across some strange things. One of my best friends died as a result of the opening of King Tut's tomb. You know how those men died—"

Eric scoffed. "Give coincidence due credit, Richard. The men died, but you can't make me believe that King Tut rose up out of his mummy case to—"

"No, not that," Ames broke in slowly. "But there is some mystical relationship between the past and the present. These prehistoric people made a great ceremony of burials and there is always a hostile something in the air when buried cities are opened. It's as though the ancient dead rise up in resentment."

"From a practical man," said Eric, "those words are a revelation. Let's get back to the hotel."

About halfway down, Ames stopped to examine the grassy slope. Brick saw at once what had caught the sharp eye of the rotund professor. A piece of turf about a foot square had been cut recently and then replaced.

"Looks like someone else wanted to dig first," said Ames. "Quite a chance to take. Any fool should know better than to stick a spade in here without permission."

Brick wondered where Jack Knight had gone in such a hurry last night when he left Florence's diner. He also wondered whether Alycia Carvis had gone straight back to the house after stopping him on the road.

But as they neared the Mound Museum, Brick forgot the piece of turf and began to wonder about Kinchie again. The rustic log building was on the edge of ground that marked the beginning of a State park. An American flag waved conspicuously from a tall flagpole, giving the building an important aspect.

"It's too early for lunch," said Brick. "Mind if we stop in here?" I'd like to meet Kinchie."

"Good idea," said Eric. "You know him, don't you, Richard?"

"Casually. Smart fellow, but still all Indian in spite of his education."

Maybe that's Florence's angle, thought Brick. The Indian brave treats a squaw as a squaw, but surely Kinchie wouldn't treat an American girl like one. Somehow, his mental picture of the museum curator involved a loin cloth and red skin.

Instead, he found himself shaking hands with a tall, well-built figure in tailored whipcords and buff shirt. Kinchie's face was a network of small wrinkles, but his hands were smooth and his grip was firm. His English was perfect.

Florence must have been kidding last night. How could she be afraid of Kinchie?

As they left the museum, Brick lingered for a last word with the Indian.

"You have a nice exhibit here, Mr. Kinchie. A very attractive young woman, named Florence Brown, told me I would enjoy seeing it," lied Brick, just to see if her name brought any reaction.

The tiny wrinkles masked the man's face in a bland expression, but Brick caught a quick flicker of surprise in the sharp, black eyes.

"An attractive girl, yes, my young friend. But walk carefully where the twigs snap. On a dangerous path, one treads lightly."

II.

About nine o'clock that evening, Brick walked home with Florence again and it was like dreaming the same dream over. This time she relaxed into easy friendliness and held Brick's arm. In spite of Kinchie's warning, the young man didn't want to read anything into her character that wasn't sweet and good.

The grille gate halted their stride.

"Come in?" asked Florance. "It's early."

Brick expected the large old house to be gloomy inside, but the living room was a cheerful achievement in delft-blue, mahogany, and touches of lemon-yellow

"Somehow, this doesn't match Aunt Alycia," he said, studying the room. "It's more like you."

"That's a keen observation, Brick. I can't understand my aunt's preference for dreary furnishings. I'll show you where she spends most of her time."

They walked through the house and Florence opened the door of a small den at the rear. Brick heard a quick intake of breath as she looked inside. She started to close the door again quickly, but a voice stayed her retreat—a soft, hollow voice.

"Come in, Florence."

It was Aunt Alycia and her voice sounded different to Brick than it had last night. There was an eerie quality in it now.

"I have company, auntie. See you later." Florence looked embarrassed.

"I know you have company, but I want to see the young man. There is important news for him."

Brick pressed forward and Florence whispered as he passed.

"I thought she'd be in bed. I hate to have you see her like this."

Alycia Carvis looked like an insane woman tonight. Her hair was disheveled and her eyes were wide and staring. She was sitting stiffly at a small table. The shades of the room were black and drawn and a reading lamp with a red-beaded shade threw a glow of tinted light on a crystal ball in her hands. Her expression was crafty and triumphant as she spoke to Brick.

"You wouldn't listen last night, young man. Now Chief Manu has struck. Your professor is dead!"

"Wishing thinking," said Brick.

"I talked to the Mound builders this afternoon. Chief Manu said he would strike tonight. I just got back from the Tabler and I know that Manu has accomplished the deed. The professor lies on his face in the dirt with Chief Manu's knife in his back."

There was something about her voice that was convincing, a crazy confidence that chilled Brick's spine.

He rushed through the house and began to run toward the Mound with Florence following him as fast as her high heels would permit.

The moon and stars enabled Brick to see clearly. There was something on the grassy slope where Ames had discovered the piece of cut turf that morning. It was Eric.

He dropped on his knees beside the figure and touched the familiar rough coat that smelled strongly of pipe tobacco.

A sick lump of grief, misgiving and rage gathered in his throat as he saw the knife handle protruding from the straight back of the grand old man. There was blood to the waist of his coat and Brick knew that it was too late for his anguished cry to arouse the professor from eternity.

Florence was out of breath, but she put a hand on Brick's shoulder in silent sympathy. "You were very fond of him?" she asked.

"You're damned right," said Brick roughly, getting to his feet, "and I'll see that his murderer gets what's coming, even if it's your strange Aunt Alycia!"

Florence drew away from him, startled by his hostile vehemence. She examined the position of the knife without shrinking from the blood. "I want you to notice something," she said quietly.

"O.K., lady. I'm not going to miss a trick. What do you find that you want me to see?"

"Just this. The knife slants downward. Mr. Humboldt was six feet tall, but Aunt Alycia is a very short woman and not at all muscular. Whoever drove that knife must have been a tall, strong person."

"That description would fit Chief Manu, no doubt!" said Brick sarcastically, remembering Kinchie's warning. "Don't try to kid me with that spirit stuff. I can't even swal-

low a raw oyster, much less a line like Aunt Alycia's."

"Your grief is making you churlish, Brick," said Florence softly. "I just wanted you to notice the position of the knife. I don't know who killed Mr. Humboldt, but I know Aunt Alycia didn't do it."

"She could have been standing above Eric on the slope. Her obsession for the spirits shows that she's capable of doing almost anything to keep what she feels is the necessary contact."

Florence's face grew whiter in the moonlight until it was just a pale blur of misery. Then she began to tremble and Brick felt ashamed of his blunt words. He put his arm around her and drew her close.

"Brick, don't be antagonistic. I don't have a real friend in Moundville and I'm going to need one."

"Nothing your Aunt Alycia does can be held against you."

"I know she didn't do it, but people will think so. You think so—"

"She's unbalanced, Florence."

"No, she isn't. She drinks laudanum—oh, I know that's almost worse than being crazy—but when she's under the influence of the drug, she's harmless enough. It acts like opium. The hallucinations seem very real to her, but that's all it is, Brick, just a dream."

"But don't you see? She might have been walking out here and committed the murder without—"

"No. I've seen her too often. She's listless, floating in a dream. She couldn't execute anything requiring physical exertion."

"But she told me about Eric!"

"Yes, and she saw him. But the body wouldn't have been a reality to her, just another figment of her warped imagination, poor thing."

"You sympathize with her?" asked Brick, wondering why Florence hadn't taken steps to have her aunt helped in some way.

"I love her, Brick. Before the dope took hold of her, she was a wonderful woman, and even now she's very good to me."

"What started the habit?"

"Kinchie knows that answer."

Florence went back to the house to telephone the police while Brick kept watch over Eric's body.

Suddenly, his eyes fastened on the hilt of the knife. The moon light caught and reflected a reddish glow that was *not* blood. He struck a match to examine it closely.

The knife was copper and looked like an artifact, an implement made by the Mound builders! He thought of the mysterious Chief Manu and shuddered. Surely, the weird tales about King Tut's tomb were not true! But where else could a knife like that come from except the heart of the Mound? There was only one answer, the museum.

The match flame burned down to his finger. As he dropped it and shook his hand, he heard a sound behind him. Before he could wheel around, a blow came crashing against his skull.

At first the mixture of voices around Brick sounded like dream voices to him. Then, his senses sharpened, he remembered that he had been knocked out and that Eric was dead. He opened his eyes, relieved to see the familiar, substantial bulk of Richard Ames.

"Can you sit up, Brick?"

He slowly got to his feet.

The Moundville sheriff was a tall, hollow-cheeked man with a drooping mustache which had yellow tobacco stains on its gray ends. But his eyes were small and shrewd. Brick knew that he was nobody's fool.

"This is Sheriff Klumpf," said Ames. "Did you see your assailant?"

Klumpf interrupted.

"Of course, he didn't see him! With a set of muscles like this fellow has, nobody could get away without a battle, and there isn't even a footprint out of line. Now, young man, tell me what happened."

"I was bending over the body, examining the knife. The match I was holding burned my finger and as I dropped it, I thought I heard something back of me."

"Did you say knife?"

"Yes, a copper knife common to the Mound people. Why?"

"There's no knife in the wound now, that's why! The murderer must have come back for his weapon and knocked you cold so he could take it without being seen."

"That doesn't seem logical," said Richard Ames slowly. "It would have been so easy for the killer to remove the knife right after the stabbing. It was risky to come back."

Klumpf was not interested in Ames' scholarly approach. "Let's get one thing straight," he drawled. "You stick to your books, Professor Ames. I been dealin' with crime long enough to know that killers don't figure with logic."

"Sorry, sheriff, but if the knife were such a damning clue that the murderer risked coming back for it, why didn't he finish off Brick, too? This young man's description of the knife will be as good as the knife itself."

"Not in court, it won't."

"That knife was unique, sheriff," said Brick. "In a way, Mr. Ames is right. A weapon like that would have to come from the museum, if it didn't come from the Mound."

"The Mound isn't open yet except for a foot-square hole. That's a funny way to start leveling one of these things," said the sheriff.

"Someone else dug in there last night, but they didn't get down far enough to find any artifacts," said Brick, wondering if Jack Knight had buried something that had to be resurrected in a hurry.

"Then we'll check with the museum. But if you folks got any idea that Kinchie did this killin', just forget it. He's got a hell of a temper and goes crazy drunk about once a year, but that's all."

"For a man who think's crime isn't logical, you're jumping to conclusions, sheriff," said Ames softly. "Not only that, but it's a Federal offense to sell liquor to an Indian. How does he manage to get drunk?"

"I never bothered to find out. Maybe Jack Knight slips it to him and I don't care if he does. To my mind, being a ward of the government shouldn't keep an educated Indian like Kinchie from voting and buying a little fire water. As for jumpin' to conclusions, Mr. Ames, I know where not to waste my time in a murder case, that's all."

Brick began to revise his first opinion of Sheriff Klumpf. A personal sympathy for the Indian didn't make it a waste of time to consider him as a subject, especially if the knife belonged in the museum.

As they drove into Moundville, Brick asked the sheriff if he could help with the investigation.

"You are a detective?"

"No, but Eric was a special friend. Ames can take over his work, but I'm interested in wringing someone's neck for killing the old man."

"Well, keep your nose out of this investigation! I can handle things better without an amateur to clutter up things. You got your draft registration card, by the way?"

Brick flushed as he pulled out his wallet.

"I'm not a dodger and I'm not 4F either. Getting this job done was important enough that the government deferred me for a month. As for cluttering up things, I guess you'll be able to do a pretty good job of that yourself!"

Brick was boiling. The egotistical old goat! If Klumpf didn't want his help, he would start out on his own.

First, the knife. Did it come from the museum? Second, Jack Knight. Why was the gambler so upset when he heard that the Mound was going to be leveled? Third, Alycia Carvis. How had she managed to be such a Johnnie-on-the-spot without meeting the murderer? Did Alycia really believe in the existence of Chief Manu? What did Kinchie know about the beginning of Alycia's laudanum habit? And why wasn't Florence afraid to walk home over a dark, deserted road? Why wasn't she afraid to live with an aunt who was a dope fiend and half crazy, to boot? Or was she?

When Brick opened the door of his hotel room that night after a brief parting word to Richard Ames, he felt like a man who had plenty of work to do. It was nearly midnight, so Kinchie could wait until morning when the museum opened. After a quick shower, he would see what Jack Knight had to say for himself.

But just then the connecting door to Eric's room opened and Florence came toward him.

"What the hell—"

"Don't shout, Brick. I don't want anyone to know I'm here."

"I'm surprised that the clerk—After all, it's pretty late—'

"He doesn't know. Sam brought me up the back way and let me in. He won't tell. He used to work for my father."

"If you are waiting for me, what were you doing in Eric's room?"

"Don't look at me like that, Brick. I thought Mr. Ames might come in with you, so I went into the other room when I heard your voices."

"Anything wrong, Florence?"

"Aunt Alycia's worse, hysterical. I had to get away for a while. What did Sheriff Klumpf say?"

Brick ignored the question.

"Did you walk down that dark road by yourself?"

"Of course."

"Better be more careful for a while.

After you went back to the house, somebody clipped me and got away with the knife that killed Eric. I hardly heard the footsteps behind me and I think Kinchie could walk like that. You wouldn't want to meet him on that road, would you?"

Her pale face went even whiter and she started for the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I've got to get back to Aunt Alycia. I didn't realize that Kinchie was mixed up in this!"

Brick pulled her back.

"So you're going to dash out through the front lobby and start back on that dark road by yourself? Use your head and tell me what it is that frightens you. What did Kinchie ever do to you?"

"I'm not afraid of him for myself, but Aunt Alycia— Let me go, Brick. I've got to get home!"

"Wait until I put on a clean shirt and wash my face. I'm going out to the country club to see Knight and I'll drop you off on the way."

Brick lifted the telephone receiver and called a cab.

They got out of the hotel without being seen, but Florence huddled close to Brick in the cab and whispered. "The taxi driver is Sheriff Klumpf's cousin."

"I might have known! The way he stuck up for Kinchie, you'd think they were related, too."

Her lips touched his ear with the next words, she was so careful to keep the driver from overhearing. "Sheriff Klumpf is a smart man, Brick. People often take him for a fool, but nobody fools him."

"Skip it," said Brick, noticing the watchful eye of the driver in the mirror. He put his own lips to Florence's ear and slipped both arms around her. "Pretend I'm making love to you, Florence. Oscar up there can't hear us, but his eyes are good. Check on Alycia when we get to your house and then come back out and go to the country club with me. I don't want the sheriff to know that I'm on official business."

The cab stopped in front of the iron gate.

"End of the line, mister," said the driver.

"Not quite. The lady is just going inside for a coat. How far is it to the country club?"

"Ten miles or so."

Brick watched Florence's slim ankles running up the path and hoped Alycia was all right. He called out.

"Bring your aunt along if you think she would enjoy it."

The girl waved from the door, but didn't answer.

" 'Scuse me, mister. You know Alycia Carvis?"

"We've met, but what business—"

"Well, seein' as you're a stranger in town, somebody ought to tell you that she's a little tetched. Jack Knight wouldn't want her around his club."

"Thanks. I'll be the judge of that."

Florence came back to the taxi with a light coat over her arm.

"Aunt Alycia declined, Brick. She's taken a sleeping powder and is already drowsy."

The driver gave a nasty chuckle and backed the car around.

III.

THE Moundville Country Club was a sprawling white structure with beautiful rolling lawns and neatly clipped ginkgo trees.

The gambling rooms were still going strong, but the tap room was empty. Brick chose a table and watched the waiter's slow approach.

"After you bring us two whiskey sours, tell Mr. Knight that Brick Stafford wants to see him."

Jack Knight, more sleek than ever in his dinner jacket, had approached soundlessly.

"Don't bother to tell me, Joe. And bring Miss Brown a bourbon and water. The gentleman evidently doesn't know what she likes." The gambler bent toward Brick.

"Want to see me?"

"Yes. Sit down."

"Spill it, quick. I'm a busy man."

Brick got to his own feet so he would be on equal ground. Joe stayed at the table, listening.

"O.K., chum," said Brick. "I want to know what you dug out of the Mound last night."

Joe took a step forward, menace rippling in his bulky muscles. Knight gave his waiter a strange look of warning.

"You work for me, Joe. Go get those drinks."

"Never mind the drinks," said Brick. "Just answer me, Knight."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about your reason for not wanting the Mound leveled. Last night,

someone dug into the hill. You wouldn't have been looking for anything, would you?"

Knight stammered and backed away. Joe, the sullen waiter, was crouching. He sprang like an animal and his fingers closed around Knight's throat.

"So you took care of the loot for me until I served my time, eh? Fifty grand in safe-keeping! I sweated out those ten years after you had your split and now you decide to grab the whole thing and give me the story that they uncovered my money when they leveled the Mound!"

Knight gasped for breath, his eyes pleading with Joe to let him explain. But the big fingers were pressing with cold fury into the throat of his victim.

Brick lashed out with an uppercut that snapped Joe's head back on his thick neck. But it took a follow-up jab to the stomach to make the enraged waiter take his hands from Knight's throat.

Joe had plenty of breath left to slug at Brick. The redhead caught a short jab on his chin before he realized that Joe was still full of fight. He side-stepped and the table overturned as he sailed in. This time Brick's hard fist splintered into Joe's jaw like a mallet on glass and the waiter hit the floor and slid along the polished surface.

Jack Knight rubbed his throat and sank into a chair.

"Thanks, Stafford. That baby thinks nothing of killing a guy."

"Did you double-cross him?"

"No, honestly. I dug the money out last night and meant to give it to him. It was all his—he stole it."

Brick straightened his tie and glanced at Florence.

"Let's go home," he said. "As for you, Knight, your unconscious chum over there and the stolen money is Klumpf's angle, not mine."

"It's Joe's rap. The dough belongs to him and I got friends in this town."

"Kinchie, for example?"

"Sure. And the sheriff, too."

"Oh, fine! Kinchie didn't lend you a copper knife, did he?"

"No, but if I wanted one, he would. Why?"

"My boss was killed with a knife like that. Maybe he saw you digging into the Mound and you decided to keep him from telling."

"Maybe you're too full of ideas, Stafford. You're barkin' up the wrong fire plug if you think I'd kill anybody over Joe's money."

"But Joe might, is that it? If the professor saw you and you told Joe about it, what then?"

"Nobody saw me," said Knight emphatically. "And if you're trying to mix me up with the murder of a guy I didn't even know, you can get the hell out of here and take the dame with you. I don't admire her taste in men."

Brick flushed with anger, but Florence took his arm and led him out.

"I wouldn't want Jack Knight to admire my taste, so forget it. I want to get home, Brick. Alycia wasn't asleep when I left. I just said that for the driver's benefit. She was quieter, but seemed to be afraid of her thoughts."

Brick knew what that was like. He was beginning to be afraid of his thoughts, too. A new picture of Eric's murder was forming in his mind, and he didn't like to look where the finger was pointing. He wanted to talk to Florence about it, but he had to wait until he could get rid of the big ears of Sheriff Klumpf's cousin. He dismissed the driver at Florence's gate.

"It's about four in the morning, Brick. Don't you think—"

"I want to see Alycia for a minute. You say she seemed to be afraid of her own thoughts for the first time?"

"Yes. She kept repeating that she had seen Chief Manu, just as though she hadn't seen that same vision dozens of times. I can't understand it. She always enjoys her hallucinations— This one just upset her."

"Of course it did, Florence! Don't you see? There's a difference between an imaginary ghost and a real one!"

"You mean—"

"I mean that she saw the killer and believes that he was Chief Manu in the flesh!"

"Then she can tell—"

"Exactly. I'll have to talk to her right now. It's as simple as that."

They walked toward the small room off the kitchen.

"She'll be back there sitting in the dark," said Florence. "I know she won't be sleeping tonight." She knocked lightly on the panel.

"Open the door, Florence," said Brick. "She may have dozed off."

Florence went inside. The soft red glow illuminated the figure of Alycia Carvis stretched on the couch in a trancelike state.

She turned her face toward the light and her wild eyes were full of misery. Brick went forward quickly and whispered to her.

"Alycia, tell me."

"Go away," came the hollow voice. "I want Florence—"

"I'm here, auntie. But you must tell Brick, too, about Chief Manu."

The woman rose to one elbow laboriously. The wildness came into her eyes and she trembled violently.

"Chief Manu is bad," she mumbled. "I saw him kill the professor and I thought it was because he wanted to keep talking to me. But tonight after you left—" She choked and the words trailed off.

"Yes, auntie—"

"He came back here . . . and—"

She fell back on the couch and a stream of blood trickled from the corner of her lips as she died.

Florence screamed and Brick opened the heavy terry-cloth robe. The wound was high on the chest and the blade must have been small and sharp to cause the internal bleeding. The copper knife had made a cruder stab than this into Eric's back.

Brick led Florence back to the living room while he telephoned the sheriff.

"Get a grip on yourself, honey. I've got to know about Kinchie before the sheriff gets here."

"He killed her, Brick! I knew he would someday. They've been in love for years, but Aunt Alycia didn't have the courage to marry him because—well, the whole family was against the idea. She loved him desperately in spite of everything and—well, the dope began to take the place of the happiness she couldn't have. Kinchie has never let her completely alone. He tormented her in little ways. He loved her so much that I think his hatred was equally deep."

"Florence, you're wrong about one thing—"

There was a faint sound at the window.

"Brick," whispered Florence. "There's someone out there—"

Brick ran to the front door and saw a figure bolting toward the gate. He ran blindly in pursuit. The man turned once to see how close Brick was and at that moment, the redhead made a flying tackle which caught a pair of whipcord breeches.

"I was going to see you in the morning, Kinchie, but tonight will do."

The man got to his feet and Brick gave Kinchie a quick frisk.

"No gun?"

"Certainly not."

"A small knife, perhaps?"

"Nothing."

"Well, come back to the house with me and wait for the sheriff."

"Is he coming?"

"You know it! The sheriff always checks up on murder, doesn't he?"

"I didn't kill the professor."

"Alycia Carvis is dead."

Kinchie didn't answer. He hesitated at the door of the house.

"I have never entered here and I have no wish to go in now. All her dead relatives and she, herself, would rise up in disapproval."

The Indian's tone was bitter, but Brick pushed him through the door. Florence lifted an angry face.

"You wouldn't let her forget you, would you, Kinchie? You ruined her life and then killed her. Then you stood at the window spying as you've done before."

"Your words are dangerous," said Kinchie with spirit.

"Your copper knife was also dangerous," said Brick, "and when you sock a man from behind, the blow leaves a bump like the one on my head! The knife did come from the museum, didn't it?"

"Yes. I recovered it because it is valuable as an artifact. I should not have struck you, but I was afraid that—"

A car stopped noisily at the gate and Kinchie broke off as though he already had said too much.

Klumpf and the undertaker, who was also the medical examiner, came into the room followed by Ames.

Brick glanced at his fellow archaeologist. "Glad you came along, sir. I need your help to prove a theory of mine."

Klumph's eyes were filled with menace as he looked at Brick. "Never mind your theories. Maybe the professor can help you explain a few things about yourself. Have a good time talkin' to Jack Knight?"

"Your cousin didn't waste any time!"

"Neither did I. My deputy went right out and arrested Knight and the waiter and brought in the money from a ten-year-old stick-up."

"Very clever of you to know when something's been dropped in your lap. If I told you the name of the killer who stabbed two people, would you know what to do?"

Klumpf looked at Kinchie without surprise at seeing him in the home of Alycia Carvis.

"Don't let anybody leave, Kinchie, I have to see the victim."

Florence looked as though she would like to slap Klumpf for the insult. Of all people to leave in charge!

Richard Ames settled his portly frame on the divan and gazed sympathetically at Brick.

"You look like you've had a hard night, son. It's foolish. The sheriff knows his job. We'll have to be getting on with the work soon."

Brick clenched his fists in an effort to control himself.

"With you in charge, professor?"

"The Mound still has to be leveled. A war can't stop because of one man. We must all—"

"A life can stop because of one man, a maniac who can't stand being pushed aside for a younger and smarter scientist! You must have been crazy to think you could get by with it, Ames!"

The professor's face darkened.

"You must be crazy to accuse me!"

"Yes? You thought Alycia Carvis was dead when you left, but she wasn't! She talked before she died."

Richard Ames sagged like a bag of meal. His egotism seemed to deflate itself with the rapid breathing of fright. His stunned expression was anything but pleasant to see.

"I had the seniority. I've worked hard and the Tabler Mound is the biggest excavation job in the history of American mounds—"

"But Aunt Alycia—" began Florence wonderingly.

"She saw him," said Brick. "Ames didn't know that he would just be Chief Manu as far as Alycia was concerned. He thought he had to kill her to keep her from telling."

Ames looked up angrily.

"You said she talked before she died!"

"She did. She said Chief Manu killed Eric, then came to kill her."

"She meant Kinchie!" shouted Ames in a panic. "The knife belonged to the museum. The Indian—"

"She knew the Indian. It's no use, Ames. Only a stranger to Alycia would make her think that she was seeing the ghost of the dead chief. It had to be you."

Klumpf had been standing in the doorway and he crossed the room now to slip the handcuffs on the unresisting Richard Ames.

"Knew it was either you or him," said Klumpf, turning to Brick. "The fat guy's confession does put it right in my lap."

"You didn't need that," said Brick. "I couldn't have knocked myself out for the copper knife."

"Kinchie told me he did that. He missed it after you three visited the museum. Either you or Ames or Humboldt could have taken it."

Florence gave Kinchie a strange look.

"Why were you snooping at the window?"

The Indian sighed. "I had a strange feeling tonight, premonition. A man who is deeply in love has a mysterious way of knowing things. It was like her spirit calling me, wanting me—"

"I'm sorry about the way the family acted," said Florence softly.

She turned her misty violet eyes toward Brick and the young man drew her out the door into the yard. The scent of jasmine was strong and a new dawn was shedding a light which brought the iron grille gate out from the shadow.

"I have a premonition, too," he whispered to her.

Florence sighed contentedly as his strong young arms went about her.

PAGAN SONG

Oh, happy dead, whose graves are dug
  In Pierian earth;
Happy ears to rot beneath
  Cloven-hooved mirth.

Oh, holy hills, where gods have walked
  And deathless ruins stand;
Oh, unkind sea, to bar from me
  My holy land!

SARA OWEN.

TELL 'EM, PAGLIACCIO!

By FREDRIC BROWN

Pop, the ex-clown, finds himself starred with a bull elephant in the biggest role of his lifetime!

POP WILLIAMS rolled them out and they came snake-eyes again. He spoke eloquently and bitterly about the matter while he watched Whitey Harper pick up the two quarters and the jig next to him pick up the two dimes.

Pop reached for the dice, and then looked into his left hand to see how much of his capital remained. A dime and a quarter were there.

He tossed down the two-bit piece and Whitey covered it.

Pop rolled a five-three. "Eighter from Decatur," he said. "Shoot the works." He dropped the other coin in his hand, and the jig covered. Pop whispered softly to the cubes and let them travel.

Four and a trey for seven

He grunted and stood up.

Valenti, the daredevil, had been leaning against a quarter-pole, watching the crap game with bland amusement. He said, "Pop, you ought to know better than to buck those dice of Whitey's."

Whitey, the dice in his hand, looked up angrily, and his mouth opened, then went shut again at the sight of those shoulders on Valenti. Shoulders whose muscles bulged through the thin polo shirt he wore. Valenti would have made two of Whitey Harper, who ran the penny-pitch, and he'd have made three of Pop Williams.

But Valenti said, "I was just kidding, Whitey."

"Don't like that kind of kidding," said Whitey. He looked for a moment as though he were going to say something more, and then he turned back to the game.

Pop Williams went on out of the tent and leaned against the freak show picket fence, looking down the midway. Most of the fronts were dark, and all the rides had closed down. Up near the front gate, a few of the ball games and wheels were still running to a few late suckers.

Valenti was standing beside him. "Drop much, Pop?"

Pop shook his head. "A few bucks."

"That's a lot," said Valenti, "if it's all you had. That's the only time it's fun to gamble. I used to be dice-nutty. Now I got a few G's ahead and a few tied up in that stuff"—he waved a hand toward the apparatus for the free show in the center of the midway—"and so there's no kick in shooting two bits."

Pop grunted. "You can't say you don't gamble, though, when you high-dive off a thing like that, into practically a goldfish bowl."

"Oh, that kind of gambling, sure. How's the old girl?"

"Lil? Swell. Blast old man Tepperman—" He broke off into grumbling.

Boss been riding you again about her?"

"Yeah," said Pop. "Just because she's been cantankerous for a few days. Sure, she gets cantankerous once in a while. Elephants are only human, and when Tepperman gets seventy-five years old, he's not going to be as easygoing as old Lil is, drat him."

Valenti chuckled.

" Tain't funny," said Pop. "Not this time. He's talking about selling her off."

"He's talked like that before, Pop. I can see his point of view. A tractor—"

"He's got tractors," said Pop bitterly. "And none of 'em can shove a wagon outta mud like Lil can. And a tractor can't draw crowds like a bull can, neither. You don't see people standing around watching a tractor. And a tractor ain't got flash for parades, not like a bull has."

To circus and carney, all elephants are bulls, regardless of sex.

Valenti nodded. "There's that. But look what happened in the last parade. She gets out of line, and goes up on a parking lot and—"

"That damn Shorty Martin. He don't know how to handle a bull, but just because he's dark and you put a turban on him and he looks like a *mahout,* the boss puts him on Lil for the parade. Lil can't stand him. She told me— Aw, nuts."

"You need a drink," said Valenti. "Here."

He held out a silver-plated flask. Pop drank. "Smooth," he said. "But kind of weak, ain't it?"

Valenti laughed. "Hundred-proof Scotch. You must be drinking that stuff they sell two bits a pint at the jig show."

Pop nodded. "This ain't got enough fusel oil, or something. But, thanks. Guess I'll go see if Lil's O.K."

He went around back of the Dip-a-Whirl to where he'd staked the bull. Lil was there, and she was peacefully asleep.

She opened little piggy eyes, though, as Pop walked up to her.

He said, "Hiya, girlie. G'wan back to shut-eye. We got to tear-down tomorra night. You won't get much then." His hand groped in his pocket and came out with the two lumps of sugar he'd swiped from the cookhouse.

The soft, questing tip of her trunk nuzzled his palm and took the sugar.

"Damn ya," Pop said affectionately.

He stared at the huge dim bulk of the bull. Her eyes had closed again.

"Trouble with you," he said, "you got temperament. But listen, old girl, you can't have temperament no more. That's for prima donnas, that is, and you're a working bull."

He pretended she'd said something. "Yeah, I know. You didn't used to be— But then me, I wasn't always a bull man, either. Me, I was a clown once. Remember, baby?

"And now you're just an ol' hay-burner for shoving wagons; and me, I ain't so young myself. I'm fifty-eight, Lil. Yeah, I know you got fifteen years on me, and maybe more'n that if the truth was known, but you don't get drunk like I do, and that makes us even."

He patted her trunk and the big ears flapped once, in lazy appreciation.

"That there Shorty Martin," said Pop. "Baby, does he tease you, or anything? Wisht *I* could ride you in the parades, drat it. You'd be all right then, wouldn't you, baby?"

He grinned. "Then that there Shorty would be mah*out* of a job!"

But Lil didn't appreciate puns, he realized. And jokes didn't change the fact that pretty soon he was going to be out of a job because Tepperman Shows was going to sell Lil. If they could find a place to sell her. If they couldn't— Well, he didn't want to think about that.

Disconsolately, he walked over to the jig village back of the Harlem Casino.

"Hi, Mista' Pop," said Jabez, the geek. "Lookin' kinda low."

"Jabe," said Pop. "I'm so low I could wear stilts and walk under a sidewall 'thout lifting it."

Jabez laughed, and Pop got a pint on the cuff.

He took a swig and felt a little better. That stuff had authority to it. More you paid for liquor, the weaker it was. He'd tasted champagne once, even, and it had tasted like soda pop. This stuff—

"Thanks, Jabe," he said. "Be seeing you."

He strolled back to the crap game. Whitey Harper stood up as Pop came under the sidewall.

"Bust," he said. "Keep track of those dice for me, Bill. I'll get 'em later. Hi, Pop. Stake me to java?"

Pop shook his head. "But have a slug of what's good for what ails you. Here."

Whitey took the offered drink, and headed for the cookhouse. Pop borrowed a quarter from Bill Rendelman, the merry-go-round man, who was now winner in the crap game. He took two come-bets, one for fifteen and one for ten, and lost both.

Nope, tonight wasn't his night.

Somewhere toward town, a clock boomed midnight. Pop decided he might as well turn in and call it a night. He could finish what was left of the pint in his bunk.

He was feeling swell now. And, as always, when he was in that first cheerful, happy stage of inebriation, he sang, as he crossed the deserted midway, the most lugubrious song he knew. The one and only grand opera song he knew. The aria from "Pagliacci."

"—and just make light of your crying and your tears.
Come—smile, then, Pagliaccio, at the heart that is broken;
Smile at the grief that has haunted your years!"

Yeah, that guy Pagliaccio was a clown, too, and he knew what it was all about. Life was beautifully sad for a clown; it was more beautifully sad for an ex-clown, and most sadly beautiful of all for a drunken ex-clown.

"I must clown to get ri-i-d of my unhappiness—"

He'd finished the third full rendition by the time, still fully dressed except for his

shoes, he'd crawled into his bunk under the No. 6 wagon back of the Hawaiian show. He forgot all about finishing what was left of the liquor.

Overhead the dim, gibbous moon slid out of sight behind skittering clouds, and the outside ring of the lot, shielded by tents from the few arcs left burning on the midway, became black mystery. Blackness out of which the tents rose like dim gray monsters in the still, breathless night. The murderous night—

Someone was shaking him. Pop Williams opened one eye sleepily. He said, "Aw, ri'. Wha' time zit?" And closed the eye again.

But the shaking went on. "Pop! Wake up! Lil killed—"

He was sitting bolt upright then. His eyes were wide, but they wouldn't focus. The face in front of them was a blur, but the voice was Whitey Harper's voice.

He grabbed at Whitey's shoulder to steady himself.

"Huh? You said—"

"Your bull killed Shorty Martin, Pop! Wake up!"

Wake up? Hell, he was wider awake than he'd ever been in his life. He was out of bed, almost falling on Whitey as he clambered down from the upper bunk. He jammed his feet into his shoes so that their tongues doubled back over the instep; he didn't stop to pull or tie the laces. And he was off, running.

There were other people running, too. Quite a few of them. Some of them from the sleeping cars, some of them from tents along the midway where a good many slept in hot weather. Some running from the brightly lighted cookhouse up at the front of the midway.

When he got to the Hawaiian show, Pop stole a glance around behind him to see if Whitey Harper were in sight. He wasn't.

So Pop ducked under the Hawaiian show sidewall, and came out at the side of the tent instead of the front of it, and doubled back to Tepperman's private trailer. Of course, Tepperman's wife might still be there, but there was something Pop had to do and had to do quick before he went to the bull. And in order to do it, he had to gamble that the boss' trailer would be empty.

It was. And it took him only a minute to find the high-powered rifle he was after. Holding it tight against his body, he got it under the Hawaiian show top without being seen. And hid it under the bally cloth of the platform.

It wasn't a very good hiding place. Someone would find it by tomorrow noon, but then again by tomorrow noon it wouldn't matter. They'd be able to get another gun by then. But this one was the only one available tonight that was big enough.

And then a minute later, Pop was pushing his way through the ring of people around old Lil. A ring that held a very respectful distance from the elephant.

Pop's first glance was for Lil, and she was all right. Whatever flare of temper or cantankerousness she'd had, it was gone now. Her little red eyes were unconcerned and her trunk swung gently.

Doc Berg was bending over something that lay on the ground a dozen feet from the bull. Tepperman was standing looking on. someone called out something to Pop, and Tepperman whirled.

His voice was shrill, almost hysterical. "I told you that damn bull—" He broke off, and stood there glaring.

"What happened?" Pop asked, mildly.

"Can't you see what happened?" He looked back down at Doc Berg, and Berg's glasses caught and reflected the beam of somebody's flashlight as he nodded.

"Three ribs," he said. "Neck dislocated, and the skull crushed where it hit against that stake. Any one of those things could've killed him."

Pop shook his head; whether in grief or negation he didn't know himself.

He asked again, "What happened? Was Shorty tormentin' her?"

"Nobody saw it," Tepperman snapped.

"Hm-m-m," said Pop. "That where you found him? Don't seem likely Lil'd have throwed him that far if she did it."

"What do you mean, *if* she did it?" Tepperman asked coldly. "No, he was lying with his head against the stake, if you got to know."

"He must've been teasin' her," Pop insisted. "Lil ain't no killer. Maybe he give her some pepper to eat, or—"

He walked up to Lil, and patted her trunk. "You shouldn'ta done it, old girl. But— Damn, I wisht you could talk."

The carney proprietor snorted. "Better stay away from that bull till we shoot her."

Pop winced. That had been the word he'd been waiting for, and it had come.

But he didn't argue it; he knew there wasn't any use, now. Maybe later, when Tepper-

man's anger had cooled, there'd be a chance. An outside chance.

Pop said, "Lil's all right, Mr. Tepperman. She wouldn't hurt a fly. If she did . . . uh . . . do that, she sure had some reason. Some good reason. There was something wrong about that there Shorty. You should've never let him ride her in the parade, even. She never did like—" And realizing that by emphasizing Lil's dislike of Shorty, he was damaging his own case. Pop let it die there.

There was, blocks away, the clang of an ambulance bell.

Tepperman had turned back to the doc. He asked, "Had Shorty been drinking, doc?"

But Berg shook his head. "Don't seem to be any smell of liquor on him."

Pop's hopes went lower. If Shorty'd been drunk, it would have made it more likely he'd been teasing the bull deliberately. Still, if he hadn't, why'd he gone by there at all? Especially, at that time of—

"What time is it?" Pop asked.

"Almost one." It was the doctor who answered. Earlier than Pop thought; he must have barely gone to sleep when it happened. No wonder so many of the carneys were still awake.

The ambulance drove up, collected the thing on the ground, and drove off again. Some of the crowd was drifting away already.

Pop tried again. "That Shorty was a crook anyway, Mr. Tepperman. Didn't he get hisself arrested when he was playin' Brondale a few days ago?"

"What are you driving at, Pop?"

Pop Williams scratched his head. He didn't know. But he said, "Only that if Lil did anything to him, she musta sure had a reason. I don't know what, but—"

The carney owner glowered him to silence.

"Wait here," he said, "and keep an eye on that bull. I'm going to shoot her before she kills anybody else."

He strode off.

Pop patted the rough hide of Lil's shoulder. "Don't worry, old girl. He won't find it." He said it softly, so none of the other carneys would hear. He tried to make his voice cheerful, but he knew he'd given Lil only a stay of execution. If Tepperman hadn't found that gun by daylight, he could easily get another at one of the local stores.

Somebody called out, "Better stay away from that bull, Pop."

It was Whitey Harper's voice.

Pop said, "Nuts. Lil wouldn't hurt a fly." Then, so he wouldn't have to yell, he walked over to where Whitey was standing at a safe distance from the bull. He said, "Whitey, what was it Shorty Martin was pinched for back in Brondale early this week?"

"Nothing. Suspicion, that's all. They let him go right away."

"Suspicion of what?"

"There was a snatch that the coppers were all excited about. They were picking up every stranger wandering down the stem. Lot of carneys got questioned."

"They find the guy who got snatched?"

"It was a kid—the banker's kid. Haven't found him yet that I heard about. Why?"

"I dunno," said Pop. He was trying to find a straw to grasp at, but he didn't know how to explain that to Whitey. He asked "Did Shorty have any enemies? On the lot, I mean."

"Not that I know of, Pop. Unless it was Lil. And you."

Pop grunted disgustedly, and went back to Lil. He said, "Don't worry, old girl," quite unnecessarily. Lil didn't seem to be worrying at all. But Pop Williams was.

Tepperman came back. Without the rifle.

He said. "Some blankety-blank stole my gun, Pop. Won't be able to do anything till morning. Can you stay here and keep an eye on the bull?"

"Sure, Mr. Tepperman. But listen, do you got to—"

"Yes, Pop, we got to. When a bull kills once, it doesn't pay to take any more chances. It wasn't your fault, though, Pop; you can stay on and help with canvas or—"

"Nope," said Pop Williams. "Reckon I'm quitting, Mr. Tepperman. I'm strictly a bull man. I'm quitting."

"But you'll stay till tomorrow?"

"Yeah," said Pop. "I'll stay till tomorrow." He watched Tepperman walk away.

Yeah, he'd stay till tomorrow all right. Just let anybody try to get him off the lot, while there was a chance to save the old gal. A Chinaman's chance.

After that— Oh, hell, why worry about after that?

The arcs on the midway were blurring a bit, and he wiped the back of his sleeve across his eyes. And then, because he knew Tepperman was right, and because he had to blame somebody, he muttered, "That damn Shorty!" What business had Shorty to come monkeying around Lil when she was asleep for the night, and what had he done to her?

He turned to look at her, and she was sleeping as peacefully as a baby. Old Lil a killer?

Hey, wait! Maybe, she wasn't! He'd argued against it, but suddenly he realized that he'd really believed, down inside, that she had killed Shorty.

But would she have? Lil had a temper, all right. But when she got mad, she trumpeted. She hadn't let out a yip tonight. Drunk or sober, asleep or awake, he'd have heard her.

He said, "Lil, didn't you—"

She opened her little red eyes sleepily and then closed them again. Damn, if she could only talk.

Who'd found Shorty's body, and where had Shorty been before that and what had he been doing? Maybe the answers to those questions could be important. Nobody else was asking them, either. Everybody else was going on—what did the coppers call it—circumstantial evidence.

Pop looked around for someone to ask those questions of, and there wasn't anybody there. He was alone, with Lil.

Somewhere a clock struck two.

He took a look at Lil's leg chain and at the stake it was fastened to. They were all right.

Walking softly, so as not to waken her, he picked his way through the dimness, around the Dip-a-Whirl and into the midway. On the soggy shavings of the path, he headed for the cookhouse.

Half a dozen carneys were sitting at tables or at the counter.

Whitey was there, and Whitey said, "Hi, Pop. Have cuppa java?"

Pop nodded and sat down. He found he was sitting gingerly, as though the seat were hot, and realized it was because he was afraid Tepperman would see him here, when he promised to stay by the bull. But what if the boss did see him? This was his last night, anyway, wasn't it? You can't fire a man who's already quit.

He made himself relax, and the hot coffee helped.

He asked, "Anybody see what happened back there? I mean, what Shorty was doin' to the bull, or how come he went over there in the first place?"

"Nope," said Whitey Harper. "Shorty was in the freak show top just after you left. That was the last I saw of him."

"Did he get in the game?" Pop asked.

"Uh-huh. Just watched a few minutes. Let's see; I came up here and borrowed a buck and went back. Shorty was there then, and left a few minutes later, somewhere around midnight. I dunno where he went from there."

One of the ride-boys at the counter said, "That must've been when I seen him. Coming out of the freak show top, and he went over toward the Ferris wheel. Pete Boucher was working on the Diesel. I guess maybe he was going to talk to Pete."

"Was he sober?"

"Far as I could see," said the ride-boy. And Whitey nodded.

Pop finished his coffee and shambled out to look for Pete Boucher. He had no trouble finding him; Pete was still working on the recalcitrant engine.

"Hi, Pop," he said. "They gonna shoot the bull?"

"I guess so," said Pop. "Tepperman can't find his rifle, or he woulda done it tonight. Shorty stopped to talk to you a little after midnight, didn't he, Pete?"

"Yeah. Guess it was about then."

"Did he say anything about the bull, or about going over there?"

Boucher shook his head. "We just talked about tomorrow, whether it's going to be a good day or not. He wasn't here long. A few minutes."

"Say where he was going, maybe?"

"Nope. But I happened to notice. He went on across the midway and cut in between the dog stand and the geek show. Valenti's trailer's over there, back of the geek show. I guess he was maybe heading for Valenti's trailer."

Pop nodded. Getting close, he thought. From the trailer, Shorty must have gone direct to Lil, and no one would have seen him make that last lap of the journey. He'd have gone around the curve of the end of the midway, probably, in the darkness back of the tents.

He said, "I can't figure out why Lil—Pete, what kind of mood was Shorty in when he was talkin' to you?"

"Cheerful. Kidding around. Said he was going to be rich tomorrow."

"He didn't . . . uh . . . sound like he meant anything by it, did he?"

"Naw. What th' hell could he mean? Say, Pop, what are you gonna do after they shoot Lil?"

"I dunno, Pete. I dunno."

Pop strolled on across the soggy midway, past the big tank and the eighty-foot tower from which Valenti dived once an evening. Pop didn't look up at the tower. He had

a touch of hyposophobia—fear of heights. Enough to give him the willies at the thought of that dive.

He went back past the dog stand toward Valenti's trailer. It was dark, and he hesitated. Maybe Valenti and Bill Gruber, his partner, had both turned in and were asleep. Must be after one-thirty by now.

The trailer itself was a black shadow in the darkness.

Pop stood at the door, wondering whether he dared call out or knock. Maybe they weren't asleep yet.

He said, "Valenti," softly. Not loud enough to waken anyone already asleep, but loudly enough, he hoped, to be heard if either Valenti or Gruber were in there, and still awake.

There wasn't any answer. He was listening carefully, and he heard a sound he'd never have noticed otherwise. A soft and irregular breathing that puzzled him, because it didn't sound like an adult at all. Sounded like a kid. But neither Valenti nor Gruber had a kid. What would one be doing in the trailer?

That breathing wasn't normal, either, or he'd never be able to hear it, even in the dead silence of the night. But why—

He hadn't heard the footsteps behind him.

But Valenti's voice demanded, "Who's— Oh, it's you, Pop. What you want?"

"Is that a kid in the trailer, Valenti—" Pop asked. "Sounds like one with the croup, or something."

Valenti laughed. "You're hearing things, Pop. That's Bill. He's got a heluva cold, along with his asthma. Wait till I tell him you thought it was croup. What did you want?"

Pop shuffled his feet uneasily. "I . . . I just wanted to ask you a question or two about Shorty." He lowered his voice. "Say, maybe we oughtn't to talk here. If Bill's sick, and asleep, we better not wake him."

"Sure," said Valenti. "Want to go up to the cookhouse?"

"I was just there. I better get back by the bull. Let's walk over that way."

Valenti nodded, and together they picked their way through the high, wet grass back of the tents. Following, probably, the same path Shorty Martin had taken an hour or two ago. Maybe, Pop thought, Valenti could tell him—

In sight of the sleeping elephant, they stopped. Pop said, "I'm still trying to figure out what happened tonight, Valenti. Why Shorty came over here at all, and what made Lil grab him—if she did."

"What do you mean, if she did?"

"I dunno," said Pop, honestly. "Just that—well, she never done anything like that before. Pete Boucher said Shorty was heading for your trailer sometime after twelve. Did you see him then?"

Valenti nodded. "He wanted to know if Bill and I would go uptown with him. Neither of us wanted to. Then he went on over this way; that's the last I saw of him. Last anybody saw of him, I guess."

"Did he say why he was—"

Pop's eyes, as he started the question, had been straining past Valenti, out toward the edge of the lot. Someone was coming from that direction, and he couldn't quite make out who it was.

And then, right in the middle of the question, his voice trailed off into silence and his eyes went wide with bewilderment.

Valenti had been lying to him. Bill Gruber, Valenti's partner, wasn't asleep in the trailer. Because it was Bill Gruber who was cutting across the lot toward them.

Valenti had lied, and there was a kid—

"What's the matter, Pop?" asked Valenti. "You look like you saw—" And then Valenti turned to see what Pop was looking at.

Bill's voice cut through the sudden silence, unconcernedly. "Hi, Pop, how ya? Finally found a drugstore open, Val. I got— Say, what's wrong with you guys?"

Valenti laughed as he turned back. "Pop, I was kidding you about—"

And those few words bridged the gap of his turning, and kept Pop off guard during the second when he might have yelled for help or started to run. And then that second was over, and Valenti's huge hand was over his mouth while Valenti swung him around.

And then, while Valenti's arm was tightening crushingly around his ribs, and Valenti's hand over Pop's mouth was bending his head backward, Pop knew what had happened to Shorty, and why. Too late now, he knew why Shorty had expected to be "rich" tomorrow. Shorty had found out that Valenti was holding the kid in the trailer, and had gone to demand a cut on the ransom.

Yes, everything fell into place all at once. Banker's kid snatched at Brondale. Held, probably doped, in the trailer. Valenti, the only man with the carney strong enough to kill, as Shorty had been killed. And as Pop Williams was going to be killed right now. So the blame would fall on Lil.

Why, when he didn't really believe Lil had killed Shorty, hadn't he thought of Valenti? Valenti, who wouldn't shoot dice because it wasn't enough of a gamble for him? Who was strong enough to wring a man's neck like a farmer would wring a chicken's, who had the nerve to dive eighty feet into a shallow tank every day—

And only a second ago, he could have yelled. He could have waked Lil, and she'd have pulled her stake and come running.

Too late, now. That hand over his mouth was like the iron jaw of a vise. His ribs and his neck—

Only his feet were free. Frantically, he kicked backward with his heels. Frantically, he tried to make some sort of noise loud enough to wake Lil or to summon other help.

One heel caught Valenti's ankle, hard, but then the shoe fell off Pop's foot. He still hadn't taken time to tie them on after that desperate rush to get out of bed and hide Tepperman's rifle.

As the crushing pressure around his ribs tightened, he tried again to yell. But it was only a faint squeak, not so loud as their voices, which, in normal conversation a moment ago, had not disturbed the sleeping elephant.

Help, adequate help, ten feet away directly in front of him—but sound asleep.

And Valenti was standing with his legs braced wide apart. Pop couldn't even kick at the ankles of the man who was killing him. He tried, and almost lost his other shoe.

Then, in extremity, a last, desperate hope.

He kicked forward, instead of backward, with all that remained of his strength. And at the end of the kick, straightened his foot and let the shoe fly off.

Miraculously, it went straight. Lil grunted and awoke as the shoe thudded against her trunk.

For just an instant, her little eyes glared angrily at the tableau before her. Angry merely at being awakened, in so rude a manner.

And then—possibly from the helpless kicking motions of Pop's bare feet, or possibly from mere animal instinct or, because Pop had never hit her, and elephants never forget—it got across to her that Pop, whom she loved, was in trouble.

She snorted, trumpeted. And charged forward, jerking her stake out of the ground as though it had been embedded in butter.

Valenti dropped Pop Williams and ran. There's a limit to what even a daredevil can face, and a red-eyed, charging elephant is past that limit. Way past.

Pop managed to gasp, "Atta girl," as Lil ran on over him, with that uncanny ability of elephants to step over things they cannot see. "Atta girl. Go get him"—as Pop scrambled to his feet behind her, and wabbled after.

Around the Dip-a-Whirl and alongside the Hawaiian show top, and Valenti was only a few yards in front, toward the midway. Valenti ducking under the ropes and Lil walking through them as though they were cobwebs. She trumpeted again, a blast of sound that brought carneys running from all parts of the lot, and from the cars back on the railroad siding behind it.

There was terror on Valenti's face as he ran out into the open of the midway. Death's hot breath was on the back of his neck as he reached the area in the center of the midway where stood the tank and the diving tower. He scrambled up the ladder of the tower, evading by inches the trunk that reached up to drag him down.

Then Tepperman was there, and the carney grounds cop with a drawn revolver in his hand. And Pop was explaining, the instant he had Lil quieted down. Somebody brought news that Bill Gruber was back of the Hawaiian show top, out cold. Running, he'd apparently taken a header over a tent stake and smacked into a prop trunk.

Doc Berg started that way, but by the time enough of Pop's story was out and Tepperman sent him to Valenti's trailer instead. No hurry about reviving a man who was going to burn anyway; the kid came first.

The cop yelled to Valenti to come down and surrender.

But Valenti had his nerve back now. Pop had a hunch what was going to happen next, and made the excuse of taking Lil back where she belonged. He did it while Valenti was thumbing his nose at the cop, and before Valenti poised himself on the diving platform—over the drained, empty tank eighty feet below.

"Smile, then Pagliaccio, at the heart that is bro-ken—"

Pop Williams' voice, off-key and cracking, but plenty loud, preceded him along the path from the lot to the carnival cars.

Continued on page 56

THE SHADOW IN THE TREES

A SHORT NOVEL

By MAUD McCURDY WELCH

Nurse Alma Toland returns to Marlsgate and once again finds that death and murder, hand in hand, stalk the corridors of the exclusive hospital.

I.

"LISTEN, Alma, I can stand for yells, howls, squeals and out-and-out screams. I'm a nurse, but"—Jane Dowdell swallowed half a cup of coffee, choked—"when it comes to apemen, that's where I draw the line."

I'd been back at Marlsgate Hospital about three weeks, and Jane and I were over at Charlie's sitting in our favorite booth eating sandwiches. I smiled into Jane's kindly pock-marked face. "Too much barbecue, too many nightmares."

Jane Dowdell snorted and almost dropped her cup. "I give you thirty days, Alma."

"You sound like a judge." I smiled, leaned back and found a cigarette.

Jane swallowed the last drop of her coffee, precious stuff these days. "I tell you, there's something queer going on around this place."

"But what?" I already had found out that it didn't do a bit of good to try to pin Jane Dowdell down. She hadn't ever been specific and I doubted if she ever would be.

She made the usual vague gesture with her large hands and said, "Oh, things, you know." Finally, after a pause, she went on, "That padded room in the basement, for one thing."

That was nothing new. Peewee, the undersized elevator boy, who was still here, had told me about this room within fifteen minutes of my arrival. It once had been used as a recreation room, filled wih table tennis, other games, a juke box, radio, even an old piano. Now it was kept locked. But Peewee, whose curiosity is insatiable, managed to be down there one day when it was being cleaned by no less a person than Otha, our blond, ascetic-looking orderly, who seemed to have it in charge. Was Otha the only one they'd trust in this room? He'd sent Peewee packing at once, but not before the boy had got a glimpse inside the room, which, besides its padded walls, he said, was now filled with a lot of queer-looking instruments.

Such a room had certainly not been needed during the time I'd spent out here before as head nurse. But I confess, that Marlsgate Hospital—now known as Resthaven, and under new management—always had seemed a bit sinister to me. One thing because of its isolated location. And it seemed even more sinister now. But I'm of the firm opinion that there are not many things that can't be explained by perfectly logical reasons.

Jane Dowdell's vague references to an apeman were absurd, of course. And yet I'd always believed her to be exceptionally well-balanced. Had she been associated so long with neurotics that she was on the verge of becoming one herself? Heaven forbid! I decided she was right in planning to take a vacation, even though we needed her very much. There was a shortage of nurses everywhere.

Strangely, most of the patients now at Resthaven were young. Alicia Brownell, No. 30, wasn't a day over seventeen, a lonely, secretive little creature, endearingly blond and fragile.

Then there was Billy Trent, a young man about nineteen, who had come to the hospital suffering from a severe cold, which had resulted in a kind of prolonged fever.

We still had Anton Beecher, the heart block patient, with us. Poor soul, not much hope for him, I'm afraid.

There were several others in varying degrees of neurosis, but with no specially marked symptoms, the only exception being that of Marie Shafer, a young woman writer of about thirty, who was suffering from melancholia. She had lost her only brother

at Pearl Harbor, and day in and day out, she just sat in her room brooding, seeming unaware of the life of the hospital flowing around her. The silent, brooding kind are the hardest to handle and sometimes result in a serious mental disturbance.

Strangely enough, it was not the patients to whom Jane Dowdell objected. It was the doctors. We had three on the staff, and needed more, of course. There had been a fourth, but I suppose like Drs. Striling and Kitric, two of the former staff members, he was in the army or navy.

Dr. Proster is the head, a gray-blond, rugged type of man, slow of speech and movement. Phlegmatic, I'd almost say. But he has a way of getting things done.

Dr. Carl Bettis is his exact opposite. He, too, is a Nordic type, good-looking with almost classic features, thick blond hair, and deeply-set, ice-blue eyes. But his disposition leaves much to be desired. He can freeze you with one glance from those ice-blue eyes and he's the most impatient man I've ever known. Hardly capable of any human feeling I've sometimes thought.

The other doctor is Alan Forsythe, whom Jane and I had known during our hospital training period and whom we liked very much.

I found out I was wrong about Carl Bettis being incapable of human feeling, for there was that time I'd walked into Alicia's room and found him holding that delectable creature in his arms. He may not have been kissing her, but I suspected it. And don't think he was the least bit ruffled when he saw me. He never lost his cold dignity for a moment; just rose and said in that cutting voice of his, "I hope you don't make a habit of bursting in on people like this, Mrs. Toland."

I'd merely opened the door and walked in as I had a perfect right to do. But nurses don't talk back to doctors. Besides he was already going out, walking with that lithe, graceful step of his, holding his head with his usual arrogance.

As for Alicia, there was a queer, excited look on her sweet, childish face. She said quickly, "I don't need anything, Alma. Please go away. I want to think."

"Provided you have anything to think with," I flung at her and was instantly sorry, for Alicia said sweetly, "Don't be cross. You know I always have an awful lot of thinking to do."

Well, that certainly seemed to be true. Alicia had a way of saying, no matter what was said to her, "Wait, I've got to think it over," which seemed rather strange in a girl so young.

Of all the patients at Resthaven, Alicia was the most unpredictable. She, too, had occasional spells of melancholia. But unlike Marie Shafer, Alicia was sometimes as gay and irresponsible as a seventeen-year-old should be. From the very first she'd seemed to have a queer obsession about Otha Wagner, our young orderly, who seemed so dour and taciturn. But neither Jane nor I believed that Alicia was a mental case. One day Jane told me that, in her opinion, Alicia was only pretending to be ill.

I couldn't accept this. Why should any girl of seventeen, and especially one like Alicia with an immense fortune, want to be shut up in a hospital? It just didn't make sense.

Then Jane had said something in her flat, unemotional voice that almost curdled the blood in my veins. "Maybe they're going to experiment on *her.*" She stopped, then added, "Maybe they're going to turn her into an apewoman."

I gave her an exasperated smile. "Listen, Jane, you'd better take a rest. You're getting a phobia."

"Nonsense," she snorted. "I've just got my eyes open, that's all. You know these doctors are only interested in their experiments. The hospital's a side issue. You know what little system they've got out here."

Well, the place wasn't exactly orthodox, but no hospital can be when short of doctors and nurses, and catering to neurotics. Jane Dowdell's ideas about these doctors caring only for their experiments was just another peculiar "kink" she'd got in her head. That sort of thing, where doctors experiment on human beings and turn them into something less than human belonged purely to the realm of fiction.

The next day we succeeded in getting another nurse, one just graduated, who looked as if she wouldn't say "boo" to a goose. Now we had three scary ones, including Lora Baxter, who was still here, and who was also a bit on the dumb side as you may remember.

But things were moving along fairly well. I hadn't as yet heard any of the howls and yells Jane complained of, but the place did have a turgid, grim atmosphere, that was wearing on the nerves. Sometimes I felt I'd give anything to hear the sound of a loud, good-natured laugh, which only proves that I'm an eternal optimist. But I've always be-

lieved that laughter is a tonic and that people can't do without it too long.

It started to rain that night when I was going off duty. One of those hard, pattering-down, businesslike rains. My raincape, as usual, was at the wrong end, so there was nothing to do but to go down to the basement, through the underground passage to the nurses' dormitory. To my surprise I found that the passage had been boarded up. What a nuisance! I'd have to go back upstairs and cross the grounds, resigning myself to a good soaking.

I started back, realizing that it was much darker in the basement corridor than I'd ever known it to be. While I was feeling my way back, I was suddenly stopped still in my tracks by an unfamiliar, guttural voice. "I tell you, they won't stop at anything. Not even murder!"

Well, I'm only human. I stood there practically paralyzed for half a moment.

There was this voice coming from Heaven only knows where. And then a strange eerie silence that seemed to beat thunderously on my eardrums. A silence so tense, so abrupt, that after another half moment, I found myself doubting whether or not I'd really heard anything. If I had, where could it possibly have come from? There was no one in the corridor. I made certain of that by peering into the shadows made by the dim, dusty light at the far end of the corridor.

It had been my imagination, of course. Maybe I was getting neurotic, too, like Jane. Maybe I'd better take a sanity test.

Somehow, by sheer force of will, I made myself walk upstairs, but several times I thought my knees would buckle under me.

Next day something unthought of happened. It was late afternoon and I was in my usual rush about early-supper trays, seeing about windows, which I'd opened during the absence of most of the patients. They'd taken advantage of the brilliant sunshine and had spent the afternoon on the grounds. I knew I'd have to go out there before long and help Lora and the new nurse persuade them to come in.

However, I had to drop everything for a call from No. 60, the heart block case. Mr. Beecher was Dr. Proster's patient and the doctor wasn't in the hospital. While looking for him, I practically collided with Dr. Bettis.

Instead of giving me a scathing look out of those ice-blue eyes, I saw that he was looking at me with a strange expression on his face. Was it fear, anxiety or what? He said, "How soon before you're off duty?"

I told him, started to go on, but he stopped me again. "There's something I must see you about. It's urgent. Just as soon as you—"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Lora, her eyes wild and owlish behind her horn-rimmed glasses. "Oh, Alma, I mean, Mrs. Toland, I can't find Alicia anywhere. She went out with the others and now she's gone!"

I remembered later that a queer, grayish pallor had spread over Carl Bettis' handsome face then, as he whirled around and walked rapidly away.

Quick as a flash, the alarm was spread over the hospital. I told Lora to stop wringing her hands and get to work. I finally located Dr. Proster down in the study on the first floor, which used to belong to old Dr. Thomas, now dead, of course. By that time Mr. Beecher was gone to all intents and purposes. Restoratives finally brought him back, but for a while it was touch and go.

It was dark when Otha found her, the fair-haired Alicia. She was lying face downward in a ravine just on the edge of the hospital grounds. There was a gash on her forehead that was bleeding profusely, and she was unconscious.

Dr. Proster dressed the wound, gave me a few brief instructions and started to leave.

I walked with him to the door. "I'm afraid we'd better notify the police. She may have been deliberately attacked." I couldn't help feeling nervous and worried.

Dr. Proster, as I may have mentioned, is the professional "patter" type. He patted me on the shoulder, and smiled. "Now, Alma," he began in his slow voice, "don't let your imagination run away with you. The child simply walked too close to the ravine, her foot slipped and she went over."

"But we can't be sure of that."

"*I'm* sure," he emphasized. "The wound is superficial, as you know. There's nothing to worry about."

I stood looking after his departing figure, feeling far from convinced. Then abruptly he turned, came back. "We're having too many visitors, Alma. Especially Billy Trent. He's too easily excited. They make his fever run higher," he finished, frowning thoughtfully.

"But his mother—" I began doubtfully. No use trying to stop her. She came two

or three times a day, regardless of visiting hours.

Dr. Proster flattened his mouth. "You'll have to let Mrs. Trent come whenever she likes. But don't let anybody else in Billy's room." He stopped, added a little vehemently, "You must discourage all visitors."

"Alicia's, too?"

He shook his head. "No, that's different. Let her cousins come when they like. They do the child good."

I'd never wanted to contradict anybody as much as I did Dr. Proster. It was inconceivable to me how a man as shrewd and clever as Dr. Proster could fail to see that Alicia's visitors were always a disturbing influence. Sometimes Alicia became exasperated, and told them to go away and never come back.

But orders are orders. I'd have to do my best to carry them out. And shorthanded as we were, it would certainly not be easy for me to know how many visitors came to the hospital during visiting hours, unless I could be down on the first floor at the desk near the big entrance doors and tabulate them as they came in. But since the hospital catered to wealthy patients, so many people came bringing flowers that the place was like a hothouse. I knew just how impossible it would be to keep track of them.

Dr. Proster had hardly disappeared down the hall before Dr. Bettis came to Alicia's door. His handsome face was impassive, but there was a queer, strained look in his blue eyes. "The minute Alicia wakes, you must let me know. I'll be in the study down on the main floor."

"Yes, doctor."

He stood there, looking at me hesitantly for a moment. "Would it be possible for you to remain with her tonight?"

Dr. Proster hadn't seemed to consider that necessary, but I had been thinking myself that it might be a good thing. I still had a feeling that Alicia had been attacked. So I siad that I'd go on night duty and send Jane Dowdell to bed. He looked relieved. I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd even gone so far as to thank me. But he didn't quite. He turned back to the door, reminding me that he wanted to see me as soon as I could find time to come to the study.

I nodded, looking after his tall, lithe figure as he walked out, and a sudden grim foreboding seized me. I don't know how or why it came. It was just a feeling I had which I could not shake off.

We finally finished the supper trays, and got all the patients, settled for the night, having our usual trouble getting patient No. 20—Mrs. Featherstone—quieted down. Always voluble, her tongue was the nearest thing to perpetual motion I'd ever seen.

Then I sent Jane Dowdell to her room in the dormitory, and settled myself in Alicia's luxurious room, after putting the various vases and bowls of flowers on the terrace just outside her windows, a very convenient place. The chaise longue covered with silk damask with numerous little silk pillows was very comfortable. I was careful to lock the corridor and felt that I could safely doze, as Alicia was sleeping quietly, and would probably do so through the entire night. She looked normal in every respect. Dr. Proster was right. It was only a slight wound. She didn't even have any fever.

It was a long night and a quiet one. About five-thirty Alicia flung an arm outside the light silk coverlet and opened her eyes. She stared at me bewilderedly. Then she put her hand to her head, and touched the bandage around her forehead.

"You hurt your head, dear, but it's not serious."

The girl's blue eyes had a faraway look, as if she were making a desperate effort to think. "I ran, Alma. I was frightened. You see, she . . . she was there hiding behind a tree." She raised herself up on her elbow, her eyes troubled, perplexed.

I smoothed her pillows. "Go back to sleep, Alicia. It's early yet."

She let me place her back on the pillows, but her eyes remained wide and questioning. "I shouldn't be afraid. But I . . . I can't help it. What makes me afraid, Alma?"

"Darling, you're just a little nervous because you had a fall. You'll be all right after you've rested."

Alicia's eyes were narrowed now. "Do you believe in ghosts, Alma, reincarnation and all that?" she asked nervously.

I almost groaned aloud. This was Lydia Featherstone's work. That woman was certainly a disturbing influence if there ever was one. I said soothingly, "Darling, of course not. Now you be quiet and try to sleep."

But another look at Alicia's wide, staring eyes and I knew it was no use hoping she'd go back to sleep.

Dr. Proster's diagnosis of Alicia's case was that she was showing signs of schizophrenia, a mind divided between sanity and delusion. At times she talked quite nor-

mally; other times she seemed to have hallucinations, although Jane and I had received Dr. Proster's diagnosis with reservations.

I saw there was no chance to coax her back to sleep and suddenly remembered Dr. Bettis' instructions. I hardly believed he'd be in the study at this hour, but went out in the hall to send Lora down there to see.

To my surprise Otha was sitting out in the corridor near the chart desk, his chair tilted back against the wall. He wasn't supposed to be on night duty. But since he was, I told him to go and see if Dr. Bettis were in the study, and if he were, to tell him that Alicia was now awake. If he'd gone, I thought I'd better wait a little while before phoning him in town. Both Dr. Bettis and Dr. Proster had apartments in the city, Dr. Forsythe being the only resident physician. He lived in the cottage out beyond the row of poplars which had once been occupied by Dr. Striling.

Otha stood looking at me in surprise. "Did you say Dr. Bettis?" He knew that Proster was Alicia's doctor.

I nodded. "See if he's there and after that, you'd better get some sleep. You're not Superman, you know."

Otha didn't smile or change expression in any way. Sometimes I thought he might have turned into a very attractive young man if he'd ever let his grim, almost dour expression relax. But he never did. He turned down the hall now, walking with rigid, uncompromising steps.

I don't know to this day how he made it so rapidly to the study and back. He had two flights of stairs to make. But it seemed to me he was back before I'd hardly turned around, and standing in the partly opened door of No. 30.

Alicia sat up when she saw him and gave him a radiant smile. "Hello, Otha, did you come to see me?"

"No," he answered brusquely.

Alicia looked at him and I thought I saw a sudden glimmer of tears in her blue eyes. "I think you're hateful. I think you're the most awful, the most hateful man I ever knew!"

Otha's impassive face did not change in the least. I became suddenly aware that he was making furtive gestures for me to come outside. When I had done so, he closed the door carefully behind me. Then he said, "Dr. Bettis is dead. He has been . . . stabbed," his voice breaking ever so slightly on the last word.

Well, I didn't scream, although it was very hard for me not to. But after Otha had walked coolly away, I felt so shaken I had to lean against the wall for a moment. Carl Bettis dead? It couldn't be true. It couldn't be. Otha said he had been stabbed. That meant . . . that could only mean murder. Once again my knees were threatening to buckle under me. Then I heard a quick voice, "What's the matter, Alma? Have you seen the gorilla, too?"

Jane Dowdell was certainly developing a fixation fast. I said with some asperity, "Jane, if you ever mention that silly idea to me again— Haven't we got enough trouble without you flying off on a tangent?"

Then I told her about Dr. Bettis.

She sucked in her breath and flattened her mouth, while I watched her a little uneasily. Thank Heavens, whatever else she was, she wasn't the fainting kind. For she got hold of herself instantly, said she'd go call Dr. Forsythe.

When Jane left, I slipped down the corridor to my small private office and called Dr. Proster. Almost immediately I heard his slow, sleepy voice, "Well, hello, hello. Who wants me?"

When I told him about Dr. Bettis there seemed to be a sort of choked silence from his end of the line. I heard him draw in his breath as if he'd practically stopped breathing for a moment; then his voice came, "I'll be there at once."

I went back to No. 30 to find Alicia sleeping naturally. A few minutes later Alan Forsythe came in. He was about thirty-nine and in spite of the merest touch of gray in his dark hair at the temples, he still had a sort of boyish look, and a slow smile. This morning he looked tired as if he hadn't slept. "Alma, this is a very, very bad business."

"I suppose there's no doubt but that it's murder," I said none too brightly.

He nodded. "A man couldn't stab himself in the back."

He took a look at Alicia then, said he was glad to see that she was none the worse for her accident, and left.

When he was gone, his words seemed to linger on the air, especially the word "accident." Had it been an accident? I still had an uneasy feeling about what really had caused Alicia to be lying in the ravine. Had she been pushed over and left for dead?

Somehow, with Jane's brisk help, we managed breakfast trays and by seven all the patients had been served. They would have to be awake early. Usually most of them slept until eight or nine, and complained bitterly if awakened before then.

Lydia Featherstone was sitting upright in bed, her gray-blond hair curled and neat, and she gave two gurgles of delight at the sight of the crisp slices of bacon on her plate along with the scrambled eggs. "Why, Alma, how nice. How really nice! Do you think the soldiers can spare it? I mean, should I really eat them? I'm frightfully patriotic, you know. I think the soldiers should have everything. I don't mind doing without it at all. Anything and everything for the soldiers. That's what I always say."

I waited wearily for her to find a period and then said I thought they could manage without these two slices at least, and started backing toward the door, hoping not to give her a chance to get started again. "Incessant" is the word for Lydia Featherstone, and she seems to have a private grapevine of her own, if you know what I mean. Before I had reached the door, however, she called me back. "Isn't it just too, too dreadful about poor little Alicia, having her head all bashed in and now that good-looking Dr. Bettis getting himself killed in cold blood. I'll tell you a secret, Alma. Alicia adored him. The poor child was dreadfully in love with him, and it wasn't puppy love, either, even if she is so young. I never saw a worse case. Alma, honestly, I never did. If you had just—"

I broke in then, said that Alicia wasn't hurt seriously, and wouldn't she please go on and eat her breakfast and not talk quite so much to Alicia, who was young and impressionable and to whom it might actually be harmful to hear so much gossip.

Mrs. Featherstone, whose name I'd always maintained should have been Featherbrain, made a round reproachful O of her small mouth. "Why, Alma, how can you say such things? I never gossip. You know I'm only trying to help. The poor, dear child is motherless. She needs guidance from a sensible older person, and I'd like to know who's in a better position to help her—"

I gave her a smile which I hoped desperately was professional and made my escape.

I was informed that there would be an inquest at nine-thirty. Shortly afterward, I faced Sheriff Grayson across the desk in my small office. He of the belligerent eyebrows and gruff voice. He seemed a little relieved when he recognized me, I thought, and said lamely, "Well, I see you're still carrying on. Heard you'd got married again?" I'd been Alma Cooper when I first came to work at the hospital.

"I did. My husband is in the Canal Zone. Enlisted right after Pearl Harbor."

"Fine man, Timothy, and a good detective. Wish we had him here now."

Well, maybe you think I didn't wish it, too.

Sheriff Grayson sat there with his forehead so furrowed in a frown that it seemed as if his bristly eyebrows met and tangled over his nose. "Sudden death is getting to be habit around here, it seems."

"Murder and violence are stalking the whole world," I answered back without any intention of being epigrammatical.

He nodded. "This Dr. Bettis—Where does he hail from?"

I had to admit that I didn't know; that I knew little or nothing of the man. Had never heard of him until I'd come back to the hospital a few weeks ago.

"And nobody else has," he said succinctly.

He left then, saying he'd be back soon.

Afterward, we had the usual run of reporters, cameramen, fingerprint experts, to say nothing of plain curiosity seekers, who were the hardest of all to get rid of. I couldn't help a feeling that it was all rather premature. How on earth I ever managed to get through with the before-noon routine is more than I understand even now.

At one o'clock promptly, Sheriff Grayson reappeared. With him was a youngish man with unruly red hair, gray eyes and a crinkly smile. That is, I imagine his smile would have been from the little crinkles at the corners of his eyes. For he certainly wasn't smiling now. His mouth was grim and his eyes were cold. But, at that, I noticed that his movements were deft and graceful. He reminded me a little of Carl Bettis, though not as tall, and certainly not as handsome.

Sheriff Grayson introduced him as Peter Kruger, the detective in charge. Telling me that I would be expected to co-operate with him and just daring me not to with those belligerent eyebrows of his, the sheriff took himself off.

I turned then and met Peter Kruger's eyes and saw there was a sort of half smile in them and the little crinkles were beginning to show. "My name *is* Peter Kruger. But I'm not German. Been here for three generations."

"Well, now that we've got that settled—" I smiled back.

The investigation had begun. Sitting there in my small office, he had me start at the beginning when I'd first come back to Marlsgate Hospital, now known as Resthaven. I told him I'd come back to find the entire personnel changed, and also the type of patient. They were all more or less mental cases now. Mostly maladjustments. The main reason for the type of patient was that the hospital was isolated, with wide, lovely grounds, which made it ideal for people with minor mental troubles not sufficiently marked as to cause them to be confined in an institution.

I told him about Alicia's accident, and Dr. Bettis' death following soon after.

"You think there may be some connection?"

I wouldn't go so far as to express myself on that. After that, he asked a few more questions and left. I was glad to get back to the routine and hurried to Alicia's room.

I was surprised and annoyed to find Lydia Featherstone there, talking with her usual volubility with Alicia sitting up in bed, wide-eyed and tense.

"I just had to come in and see how this poor, sweet darling is getting along, Alma, so don't scold me for it. I just wonder and wonder who on earth would want to kill such a sweet, innocent person, and one so young? I'm so sympathetic, you know that, Alma, and I just keep thinking about this child and wondering if the killer is still around and who'll be his next victim."

"Please, Mrs. Featherstone." I motioned her to go out of the room, and, to my relief, she obeyed.

I was glad to find I was in time to prevent Mrs. Featherstone from telling Alicia of Dr. Bettis' death, for Alicia said quietly, "Nobody tried to kill me, Alma."

"No, of course not. Don't pay any attention to that woman."

"But all the same," Alicia began thoughtfully, "there was—" She was interrupted by the entrance of Violet and Ariel Brownell, her two cousins, about her own age. They came in with a little rush, Violet with her arms full of flowers, and Ariel lugging an enormous basket of fruit. "Alicia, dearest, we've just heard. Daddy kept it from us until lunch. Are you sure you're going to be all right, Alicia, darling?" This was Violet who did most of the talking.

Alicia eyed both of them stonily. "I'm all right." She gave me a look of appeal.

For some reason, Alicia never had seemed to like these two gushy cousin of hers. I told them in my best professional voice that Alicia had not been seriously hurt, but she was a little nervous, and perhaps it would be best for her not to have company just now.

"I'd like to know what you've got to do with it," Violet retorted. "You're just a nurse, aren't you? Dr. Proster told us we were to come and stay with Alicia as long as we like."

I think I'd felt from the first that Alicia's dislike of her cousins was well-founded. They were both spoiled, rather disagreeable girls. I should have liked nothing better than to have put them out, but instead I said smoothly, "Suppose we leave it to Alicia, as to whether she feels like company."

"I'm tired," Alicia said promptly.

There was another little rush toward the bed. "Oh, Alicia, darling, we're so sorry." It was Violet again. They both kissed her gushingly, and promised to come back tomorrow when they were sure "poor, dear Alicia" would want to see them, and maybe by that time they could find a better nurse for her. They'd try, and giving me a venomous glance, they went out.

Alicia said, "Thank you, Alma," in a tired voice, adding more wearily, "I never can think when they're around."

I sat down beside the bed. "Don't think now. Just rest and go back to sleep."

Alicia shook her head and I saw there were tears in her eyes. Then she said piteously, as if knowing that her request would not be granted. "I want to see Otha."

"I think he's gone to his room. You see, he . . . he's been on night duty so much, he needs sleep."

Alicia closed her eyes. A faint flush stole into her sweet, pale face. Her voice came low, "It was Otha who picked me up. And I heard what he said. He thought I didn't," She stopped, smiled a little. "Otha says things that—" She stopped, smiled again. Then: "You know, don't you, Alma?"

Well, of course I didn't. I thought Alicia had probably been dreaming. She was always wanting Otha to talk to her. The dream was probably a wish fulfillment.

But a sudden thought struck me. Otha sitting in the corridor in a position from where he could have a clear view of Alicia's door. Was he on guard? Did he know something about the attack on Alicia, if it had been an attack?

These were questions on which I could only surmise. But sitting there at the bedside of this delicate, lovely girl, I became convinced that her "accident" and the death of Dr. Bettis were somehow connected. And I suddenly remembered that Dr. Bettis had said he had something urgent he wanted to tell me. Well, I'd never know now what it had been.

II.

PETER KRUGER wanted the staff to meet again in the small consultation room down on the first floor. He probably had had high hopes of getting the matter quickly settled. He came out looking baffled.

The two doctors, Dr. Proster and Dr. Forsythe, also Otha Wagner and Fred Bates, the other orderly, answered all questions frankly. Dr. Proster and Dr. Forsythe were extremely polite and politely bored. Otha was impassive; Fred was plainly bewildered. Lora answered questions with her usual dumbness; Jane Dowdell curtly, not forgetting to add her own personal opinion. I was greatly relieved that she didn't bring up the gorilla.

This had consumed over an hour and the only positive result was the fact that nobody knew anything. Or if they did, they simply weren't telling.

Death to doctors, as well as to nurses, even murder, is a thing you take in your stride. When death strikes, the doctor's responsibility ends. Thereafter, it's a subject to be tacitly avoided.

A little later Peter Kruger came into my small office, sank into a chair, crossing one long leg over the other. "This Dr. Bettis was stabbed from the back, the weapon penetrating one of the cavities of the heart. Where would you suggest as the best place to look for the weapon?"

I hadn't the slightest idea.

"And nobody else has, as I may have mentioned before." He got up suddenly. "We'd better make the rounds. Here's hoping the patients will show a little more intelligence than the staff."

"That's hardly fair," I objected, at which Peter Kruger grinned engagingly. "Don't mind me. I'm a bit peevish."

We started making the rounds.

Mr. Beecher, the heart block case in 60, was propped up on his pillows, eying his tray with superb distaste. The detective asked him a few questions, which he answered sullenly. But it was plain enough he knew nothing. How could he? He'd been unable to leave his bed for a long time.

Young Billy Trent, No. 20, received me with an angry question. "What's this about my not having company, Alma? I'll see my friends when I get ready. You can just tell that to your precious Proster."

Lydia Featherstone again. Drat the woman! I reminded Billy that he mustn't get excited or his fever would come up.

"Oh, yeah!" Billy exploded. Then his expression changed. "I'm sorry, Alma. It's not your fault. But they can't keep me here like this. I won't stand for it."

"Who can't keep you here?" Peter Kruger put in quickly.

Billy raised himself up on an elbow. "Who're you? Another one of 'em trying to tell me—" He stopped and his expression suddenly grew guarded.

I said, "This is Mr. Kruger, Billy, a . . . a friend."

Billy relaxed. "He's not a doctor, huh?"

"No."

I saw that Peter Kruger didn't have much hope of getting any information from Billy, whose attitude had suddenly grown both guarded and suspicious, so we went into Lydia Featherstone's room, which was next to Billy's.

She was lying on a chaise longue, wearing a blue satin negligee and blue-feathered mules. She had diamonds in her ears, at throat and wrists, and her blond-gray hair was, as always, beautifully dressed. Her own beauty operator came in every morning. The room was also filled with flowers. Burning up the oxygen, of course. I started taking them out, expecting to meet opposition, but the woman's eyes were on Peter Kruger. "I bet you're a detective. In fact, I know you are, even though you don't look like one. Detectives never do, do they? That's part of their tricks. But if you really want to know anything you'd better ask me. I know a lot. I've read five thousand detective stories. So if you're after facts—"

I could have said, "Who wouldn't know a lot, snooping around and listening at doors, the way you do?" but I managed to force the words back. However, Lydia Featherstone must have read my thoughts, for she came back at me, "Don't blame me, Alma, because I've got good ears. Somebody should have told Billy that Dr. Proster said he couldn't have any visitors except his mother. And I know why. It's because Billy found out about the fifty thousand—" She

stopped then, but only to draw another breath and begin again. "And if you ask me, I'll tell you there's a woman involved. There always is, isn't there, Mr. . . . er . . . er—"

"Peter Kruger is the name."

Lydia smiled. "I'm psychic. That's how I know so much."

It was all I could do to keep silent. I heard Peter Kruger saying a little weakly, "You're psychic, you say?"

"Yes. I go into a trance and the spirits tell me things. So if you want me to, I'll go into one right now and find out the things you want to know. I have a familiar spirit I can always call on, and I wouldn't mind—"

Peter Kruger was wiping his brow with an immaculate handkerchief. I put in hastily, "I don't think that will be necessary now, Mrs. Featherstone, but thank you just the same."

We went out. Peter Kruger said, "Whew!" when we got in the hall, and wiped his brow again.

We went into Marie Shafer's room then. She was slumped dejectedly in a big armchair and didn't seem to be aware of our presence. Of late I'd believed that Miss Shafer was getting better. Now she seemed to have lapsed again.

We left her room without saying anything to her. Peter Kruger then signified by a weak gesture that he'd had enough. He followed me back into my small office, took out a cigarette, but seemed to remember that smoking was forbidden.

I told him to go on and light up. He said, "Thanks," and leaned back in his chair, blowing smoke rings, his eyes still baffled. "Look here, Mrs. Toland, is everybody around here wacky, including the doctors?"

Well, sometimes that was a question which I myself was almost ready to answer in the affrmative. "There's only a thin line of demarcation between neurotics and manic-depressives, I'm afraid."

Peter Kruger subsided deeper in his chair. "Would you mind speaking English?" he grumbled.

Well, I was feeling low myself, or else I wouldn't have made a statement like that. There were only times when I thought I believed it.

Peter Kruger ran his fingers through his already unruly red hair, leaving it standing up almost straight on his head. Then as if becoming suddenly conscious of what he'd done, he smoothed it back with a quick, almost vicious gesture, and sat up straight. "Let's get back to the girl Alicia."

What I really wanted to do was to get to bed, but naturally didn't mention it. He wanted to know what explanation she gave; what she said when she regained consciousness.

"It could easily have been an accident. She says she was running. The supposition is that she ran too close to the edge of the ravine and fell over." Maybe I was trying to make myself believe that. I didn't know.

Peter Kruger's eyes were suddenly hard and narrowed. "Running, was she? And from whom?"

"Nobody. Purely imaginary." The words must have come from me a little flatly, for Peter Kruger got up with a sort of exasperated gesture and thrust his hands in his pockets. "The real question is, does anybody know anything, outside of Mrs. Featherbrain, who doesn't, never did, and never will."

"No." The word sounded like a miniature explosion.

Peter Kruger gave me a look then that said, "As a nurse, you should be an inmate yourself." Then his voice came gloomily, "A girl is left for dead in a ravine. A man is killed in the night. And there are no clues, no suspects and nobody knows a thing. Not a thing," he finished emphatically, making a little clicking sound with his teeth. Then he suddenly drew his wallet from an inner pocket. "No clues except this, which is probably not worth a darn."

He held a small varicolored feather in his hand. I stared at it, thinking that such a simple, innocuous thing couldn't possibly have anything to do with the accident to Alicia or the death of Dr. Bettis.

The detective put it back in his wallet with a shrug. He'd found it, he said, lying at the foot of a big tree out on the grounds, when he'd been out there covering the whole of the grounds, searching for clues.

He'd been gone all of a minute and a half when I suddenly remembered something. Alicia had said,, "You see, she . . . she was there. I saw her hiding behind a tree."

Dr. Bettis was buried the next afternoon. I took a last look at those stern, handsome features, hardly relaxed even now in death, as he lay in his casket at the mortuary. Strange there was no one here to mourn his passing.

Dr. Proster, Dr. Forsythe, Jane Dowdell

and myself drove to the cemetery in the funeral car provided by the mortuary. There was a small crowd, mostly curiosity seekers, as it was easy to see. There were only two flower sprays, white carnations from the Funeral Home, and a large spray of gladioli from the hospital.

We left the mortuary employees to the melancholy task of filling in the grave. Back in the hospital, I discovered I'd lost my wrist watch. Once before the clasp had become unfastened, and I'd almost lost it. I thought I knew where I'd dropped it this time. I remembered hearing a soft thud in the grass when I'd been sitting in one of the chairs beside the open grave.

So I went back to Elmwood Cemetery in a taxi, and cut across a path to the grave, leaving the taxi to wait near the entrance gates.

The workers were gone, the flowers in place, but someone else was here. A woman bending over the grave. She wore a shabby black dress, rather long, and a queer-looking hat pulled down over her face. She arose when I approached and walked rapidly away, but not before I caught a glimpse of a pale face and fever-brilliant blue eyes.

I found my watch right where I expected to find it, started away when something about the grave attracted my attention. There had been two flower sprays, now there were three. A long blanket of expensive white and yellow roses placed there, as I was practically certain, by the woman in the shabby dress and bedraggled hat. It seemed strange.

Back in the hospital again, Jane Dowdell told me to get some sleep tonight. She went on in her brusque voice, "And tell Otha to go to bed, too. Why is he always sitting around in the halls? Doesn't he ever go to bed?"

I said if he did, it was more than I'd been doing.

But I did get a full night's sleep that night.

The next morning about seven Jane and I snatched a quick breakfast. She told me that Marie Shafer wanted to see me, and left.

I took in Marie's breakfast tray and sat down beside her bed. To my surprise she had been crying, which was one of the best symptoms she'd had yet, proving that she was beginning to feel things again.

Marie Shafer was a striking brunette with heavy black curly hair, large dark eyes and a small, heart-shaped face. I could imagine how she'd look in the right sort of colorful clothes, of which she had a good many, but never wore.

She said with a swallowed sob, "Alma, I thought I was getting well, and now I know there's no use hoping."

"You are better, my dear. Lots better."

She shook her head. "I might have believed that yesterday. But I'm seeing things now. Hallucinations, I suppose they'd be called."

I smiled reassuringly. "I don't believe you're having hallucinations. Perhaps you've seen real things and let yourself imagine they weren't real."

She looked at me, her dark eyes wide, suddenly hopeful.

"Suppose you tell me all about it," I suggested.

"It might have been a real person," Marie began slowly. She broke off abruptly. "But you'll think I'm crazy."

"I certainly will not," I said, smiling.

Marie looked at me, tears suddenly standing in her eyes, and how glad I was to see them! "She . . . the person I saw was out there." She pointed to the terrace which ran in front of her low French windows as well as those of Alicia's room. On one side of the terrace there was a long flight of stairs leading down to the rose garden. These stairs had been added during my absence and I didn't think they were ever used.

I suggested that she drink her coffee and then go on.

A few minutes later she put down the cup, touched her lips daintily with her napkin and said, "I'm supposed to have a photographic memory, and while I only caught a glimpse of this person I . . . I thought I saw looking through the terrace windows, I can describe accurately what I thought I saw. She was slender, not overly tall. Her clothes weren't very nice. She had on a funny hat, pulled down over her face." She stopped, seemed to shudder, then forced herself to go on. "The reason I'm sure that it wasn't a real person is because her eyes seemed so strange. A real person's eyes are not like that. Hers seemed to glow, you know like a cat's in the dark."

"That could very likely be because of the light in your room." I asked then as quietly as I could, "Her eyes were blue?"

She nodded. "They were very blue."

I knew, of course, that Marie was describing the woman I'd seen at the grave of Dr. Bettis. As if to dispel my last doubt, Marie went on, "The hat, as I have said,

was one of those old-fashioned helmet things. It had a small pompon of feathers right in the center, standing up in a sort of scattered way as if they were loose."

They were loose. Peter Kruger had found one of those feathers.

As soon as I could, I went to look for the detective. Found him, of all places, on the main floor, down on all fours on the floor, a small magnifying glass in his hand.

I gave a gasp when I saw what he was examining. A bloody print of a shoe. There were several other prints like it, I saw, none very distinct, leading to the elevator. I said —my voice suddenly down in my throat— "Is it blood?"

Peter Kruger didn't answer. He had an envelope in his hand, and a small knife, one blade open, with which he was scratching at the footprint, and carefully pushing the small segments into the envelope. When he'd finished, he went to the next footprint, and did the same thing. Then he rose, and to my surprise, answered my question. "I'm not sure yet whether it's blood or not. It certainly looks like it. It's dried, of course." He folded the envelope carefully, put it into his wallet. "Want to see me?"

I nodded. We went up to my office. When he had a cigarette lighted, he said, "These three doctors out here, or rather the two of them, are psychiatrists. Why are they so interested in brain surgery?"

I didn't know. But it seemed natural to me for a psychiatrist to be interested in brain surgery.

Peter Kruger evidently didn't think so. A psychiatrist is hardly ever a surgeon, or is he?"

Well, I hardly suppose so. Some of them might easily have been, though.

He went on, explaining that he'd found in Dr. Bettis' desk, a list of patients from the charity hospital, all of whom were suffering from brain disorders. He wanted to know if we took charity patients at Resthaven.

The answer to that was obvious. Every patient in the hospital was wealthy. The fees were enormous.

Peter Kruger broke into my thoughts by dropping the small ruler he'd been balancing on his forefinger. "My guess is that they are carrying on some kind of experiment."

I almost jumped at that last word. Experiment! A cold, frightened word.

"That has to do with the brain, naturally," he concluded.

It was all I could do then to sit still, remembering Jane Dowdell's oft-repeated warning. But I still didn't, couldn't believe there was any kind of unlawful experimentation going on here, in spite of that padded chamber in the basement.

Peter Kruger was ready now to dismiss the subject. "They have a blood bank here, don't they?" he asked, squinting his eyes.

I nodded.

"Suppose they . . . that is, the blood plasma—" he stopped.

I waited, looking at him questioningly. When he didn't go on, I asked, "You don't mean you think there's a possibility that they are using the blood plasma for a . . . a sinister purpose instead or for a good one?"

"All kinds of queer things happen these days, you know."

"But they couldn't get by with anything like that. The laws are strict, and the government is very watchful."

"The government is very busy trying to win a war," he said gloomily. He picked up the ruler again, eyed it steadfastly for a moment, then looked up. "Now you take this man Bettis. It's not natural for a man to die and not leave any more trace of his life than he did. And, then, he'd made every arrangement for his funeral, quite as if he'd expected death at any moment."

"A good many people do that. Doctors face death every day of their lives, which is probably the reason they prepare themselves for it."

"Yes, granted. But why doesn't somebody know something about this murdered man? I haven't even been able to find the key to his safe-deposit box yet. All I know is that he has one."

"And you haven't found a soul who knows him except just casually?"

He shook his head. "If either of these doctors know anything about him, they are the worst liars I've ever encountered. And I've met all kinds of plain and fancy ones in my day. The truth is, they're hiding something from me, and they're all in cahoots. But I'm going to find out what it is, if I have to tear down the hospital."

Well, I certainly hoped it wouldn't come to that.

He sat in thought for a moment, looked up, frowned. "Now to get back to the charity patients. These doctors may have been doing charity work on the outside. But even at that," he went on frowningly, "they wouldn't have taken on practically all the mentally disordered patients in the State charity hospital."

"Hardly." I didn't believe they'd treat any of them, though I didn't say so.

Peter Kruger flattened his mouth. "But suppose Dr. Bettis had operated on one of them, or experimented on one, and the patient had died. Suppose some members of this man's family killed him in revenge?" But he shook his head before I could answer. Evidently, that idea was not so good.

I told him then about the feather which I was convinced now had come from the mysterious woman's hat, the one I'd seen at the grave of Dr. Bettis, and who had been seen by Marie Shafer on the terrace, the woman whom I also believed might have been the person who had frightened Alicia and caused her to run and fall into the ravine.

"The feather I have came from this woman's hat."

"Undoubtedly."

"And Alicia was running away from a woman?"

I nodded, explaining that I had not given this much thought until Marie Shafer told me about seeing the woman on the terrace.

He rose then. "I'm going out and look around the terrace. See you later."

III.

ALICIA was beginning to ask questions about Dr. Bettis. I evaded them as best I could. But once or twice I caught the girl's clear gaze, and had to drop my eyes.

When I went into her room later in the day, she said quite calmly, "I know Dr. Bettis is dead."

She said it so quietly that I was relieved. "I suppose Mrs. Featherstone—"

Alicia nodded. She looked pale and tense, but seemed to have herself under good control. "Do you believe he was murdered, Alma?"

Under her direct, demanding eyes I had to turn away again. Just then Lora came for me. I started to the door with her, then Alicia said, "She killed him, you know."

I went back to her for a moment. "Alicia, dear, please stop having such morbid thoughts. We . . . we're not exactly certain yet that he was murdered. I mean, the weapon hasn't been found, and until then—"

Alicia said then, "Let me think." I was only too glad to let it go at that.

It rained again that day. By six o'clock it slackened up a bit so that Jane and I were able to run over to Charlie's. I hadn't seen Peter Kruger all day, though I knew he'd been in and out of the hospital, and I wasn't prepared for Jane's news.

She sank onto the bench with a sigh. "Well, they're going to pin it on Alan. And if he murdered Dr. Bettis, then I'm a monkey's uncle, or aunt or something." Jane's kindly face looked worried and fear lurked in her eyes.

"Alan!" I echoed a little wildly.

Jane nodded. "You know he hasn't been able to find his surgical scissors? Well, Kruger found them. They were stuck in the mud of the ravine. Had probably been buried there, but because of the rain, part of the handle was sticking up."

"But that doesn't prove—"

"Peter Kruger considers it positive proof," Jane put in grimly.

We hurried back to the hospital, after having agreed to split the night shift between us. I had a feeling that one of us should be on duty constantly as Lora and the new nurse were jittery. I didn't believe either of them could be trusted in an emergency.

At twelve when I went on duty, it was still raining. I ran across the grounds, conscious of a sort of edgy feeling myself. Murder, violence, sudden death. It had struck once. Would it strike again? I'm not psychic. I'm not even more than ordinarily sensitive, but that the atmosphere about the place was thick and dark and ominous could not be denied.

Nevertheless, Jane Dowdell told me that the night had been tranquil. All the patients had slept quietly. No one had awakened to ask for so much as a drink of water. "Even the Featherstone woman has been practically dead to the world," Jane finished.

The way Jane used that word "dead" caused my nerves to give a jump. I went at once to look in on the woman and was certainly relieved to find her sleeping naturally. That woman could think of more things to want during the night. Usually, we had to answer her light from four to five times.

It was when I was leaving her room that I saw the light was on in 30, Alicia's room. I went in at once to see what was wrong. Alicia was sitting up in bed, her eyes intent on something that seemed to be floating around the room. I followed her gaze and blinked my eyes once or twice. I couldn't be seeing what I thought I saw. I couldn't be.

And then it dissolved. Or rather burst. A soap bubble, or, at least, that's what it appeared to be. But, of course, it couldn't have been. It was just a sort of—well, an optical illusion. It had to be.

Alicia was still sitting up, still not moving her eyes from the spot where the soap bubble had appeared to be. When I went over and smoothed her pillows, told her to lie back again, she said, "Alma, did you see what I saw?"

"Darling, you're half asleep, dreaming, aren't you?"

"No. No, I'm not. I haven't been asleep. I've been thinking."

"Then you must go to sleep right now." I stood there trying to decide whether or not to give her a sedative.

She was lying back on the pillows now, apparently content.

"If you wouldn't think so much, you'd sleep more."

"All right, Alma. I'll go to sleep." Alicia closed her eyes.

I stood there beside her bed, thinking. Alicia hadn't, couldn't have blown that soap bubble. There was nothing on the bed or night table, or on the floor near the bed which she could have used for such a purpose. I went in the bathroom. There was a cake of soap lying on the basin. I picked it up. The soap was dry.

I went back in the room convinced that I hadn't seen a soap bubble, and neither had Alicia. And then I stopped. Right at the spot where the bubble had burst was a dampish place on the expensive blue velvet rug. Here was something that had to be accepted as concrete proof that there had been a soap bubble.

I stood looking at the damp spot indecisively. I should do something about it, but what? What could one do about a thing as evanescent as a soap bubble, if anything?

A sudden wild, piercing scream drove all other thoughts from my head.

Alicia sprang up like a jack-in-the-box.

I ran out of the room, down the corridor in the direction from which I believed the scream had come.

Luck was with me. Halfway down the first flight of stairs, I found Marie Shafer cowering against the banister, looking as if she might faint at any moment. In another minute the orderly came to help. Not Otha, but the other one, whose name I never can remember.

Together we got Marie to her room and into bed. She was shivering, even though the night was warm. And her light silk robe and black kid slippers were damp. She'd been out in the rain.

I brought her a glass of hot milk. No time for questions now. She drank it gratefully. "You're very sweet to me, Alma. But nobody can help me now."

"I wouldn't talk yet. Try to sleep. You're all right."

Marie lay back on the pillows, shook her head, tears running down her cheeks. "No. I'm losing my mind. I shall have to be confined in an institution. You see, you convinced me before that I'd really seen a person, and was not having hallucinations. But this time, it . . . it couldn't have been anything human. And so I know my mind is gone."

I gave her a sedative. "Now be quiet, and don't talk. Tomorrow you'll see things differently."

I stayed beside her bed for half an hour until she at last fell into a troubled sleep. Then I went in and looked at Alicia again. She was asleep now, but she was holding something clutched in her hand. A small piece of paper. I wondered if I could extract it from those curled fingers without waking her.

Where had it come from? She hadn't had it when I was in here before. I had searched the bed carefully, and I would have seen it. Gently, slowly, I managed to draw the slip of paper from those slender fingers. Alicia stirred a little, but did not waken.

I opened the paper, feeling a little conscience-stricken for doing it. On it was written in a nervous, irregular hand:

Think! You can remember.

After reading it, I sat down a little weakly. It was simply too much for me. Had Alicia written it herself? The handwriting didn't seem to be that of a young girl's. But everything considered, I decided it would be the thing she might be expected to do. Wasn't she always saying she wanted to think? Had she forgotten something she considered very important, something she was constantly exerting herself to remember? Still, this didn't seem a very good reason why she should write notes to herself. Dr. Proster, as I have said, diagnosed her case as a split mind, a diagnosis which neither Jane nor I were able to accept. It

may not be generally known, but nurses often disagree with doctors, but naturally they have discretion enough to keep their convictions to themselves. But there were so many times when Alicia was calm, and had herself under such rigid control, that Jane and I felt that her trouble was more of a temporary emotional nature rather than near insanity. Maybe now Dr. Proster was going to be proved right.

I went out and sat down at the chart desk, leaning wearily against the back of the chair. Then a sudden thought came that made me sit bolt upright. Marie had said that this time she had seen something that couldn't be human!

Cold beads of perspiration stood on my brow. My hands were clenched. I wished Timothy were here. Or, better still, I wished I were with him down there in Panama with the snakes and mosquitoes and heat, and what-else-have-you. I wished I were a hundred miles from Resthaven Hospital.

But, of course, had I the chance to leave, I knew I'd never take it, unless to go to Timothy. Shaken as I was, and I'll go so far as to admit it, frightened, too, because Marie's "something that wasn't human" sounded like Jane Dowdell's gorilla. I wouldn't leave Alicia in her trouble, or Marie with hers, or Billy, or even Lydia Featherstone, whom so often I'd like to throttle, or any of the others. I loved them all. They were my patients. But they were more than that. They were my children, too, because I never had any of my own.

The next day I learned that Dr. Forsythe was to be arrested for the murder of Dr. Bettis.

Of all the people in the hospital, from the head down to the cleaning women, Alan Forsythe was the person least of all to be suspected of such a crime. There had been times when I'd had doubts whether Dr. Bettis, and yes, even Dr. Proster, were human. But Alan Forsythe, never. He was kindness itself. Gentle and generous always.

Well, Mrs. Featherstone's grapevine was certainly functioning. The patients all knew about Alan, even though Peter Kruger had only admitted it half a hour before I came on duty.

Marie sent for me. She was sitting up in a negligee of blue chiffon, her face pale. She clutched my arm the moment I came in. Is it true, Alma? Tell me. Tell me."

I sat down beside her.

"Alma, tell me. I've got to know."

"Lie back and try to be calm, and I'll tell you what I know."

She went back to the bed, and I could see she was making a desperate effort to be quiet.

"That's better," I said. "You want to know about Dr. Forsythe?"

"Yes, yes"—breathlessly.

"They may arrest him today. But I'm convinced they'll never convict him."

Marie sprang up, her eyes wild. "Alma, you go to Al . . . to Dr. Forsythe at once. Tell him he knows what to do and to do it at once."

I rose. "All right." I started to the door, came back. "But first answer a question for me, will you? What did you think you saw last night when you were so frightened?"

"A monster, a . . . a gorilla or something." She stopped, staring at me. "You don't think I actually saw one?"

I shook my head, trying hard to smile. "A trick of the lights or the rain."

Marie said, "Please go to Alan at once."

I looked the place over for Dr. Forsythe, then went to Charlie's. He wasn't there, but Peter Kruger was. He motioned me to come into the booth. "Sometimes the hospital gives me the jitters. And I have to get away."

"We all feel that way sometimes." I motioned Charlie to bring me a cup of coffee. "Are you actually going to arrest Alan Forsythe today?"

He reddened and ran his fingers through his hair. "Never saw such a place for underground work. How do they do it?"

"I wouldn't know." I was beginning to feel unutterably tired. Besides I had to find Alan before he was arrested. But there were things I had to know. "On what evidence do you expect to hold him?"

He looked at me, his eyes squinted up. "The surgical scissors which I found buried in the mud of the ravine. There were no fingerprints. Not to be expected, of course. But, though they had been wiped clean of the blood, upon unscrewing the two parts, I found that a bit of the blood had trickled in between them, and was still there, the two parts not being as tightly screwed together as perhaps they should have been."

"He didn't do it. I don't believe Alan had any reason to."

The detective looked at me, his eyes still narrow. "Dr. Bettis and Dr. Forsythe had a bitter quarrel on the night of Bettis' death. I got that out of your Adonis, young Otha, whom I've always believed knows more than he's telling."

"Dr. Bettis quarreled with the nurses and doctors a lot. He was a precisionist, if there is such a word; everything had to be absolutely perfect down to the tiniest detail. He also had a very bad temper. If quarreling with him is any evidence, then practically everybody in the hospital could be suspected."

"But they don't all have a pair of surgical scissors with a bit of dried blood between the parts where they're screwed together."

I started to rise. "All the same, he didn't do it." I suddenly thought of something else. "What about the bloody footprints?"

I thought he looked a little sheepish. "That's the most puzzling thing of all. It's clay. Crimson clay. I found a good-sized piece of it on the terrace, lying under the banister. There must have been some more out there, and somebody stepped in it and then came on through into the main hall. That would explain the footprints. This clay is the kind children use for making models."

"Nobody around here uses a thing like that." I rose this time, decided to go to the cottage and look for Alan. He wasn't there, even though the front door was ajar.

But I found him when I went back down into Dr. Thomas' old study where Dr. Bettis had been killed. He was sitting moodily behind the big desk. As I came in, he glanced up and said, "Sometimes, I think, Alma, the old boy had the right idea."

He was referring to old Dr. Thomas, of course, who once had owned the hospital jointly with Miss Gertie, his relative. Both were dead now.

"He was the living exponent of letting the world go by, the way of least resistance. Perhaps he learned early in the game that it's no use kicking against the odds, and the chap who puts in his five cents' worth and tries to do something to help the world is the one who gets the ax or maybe the axis gets him. A very bad pun, I know." He stopped, smiled a little, then his face became grim. "I didn't kill Dr. Bettis. But they'll probably electrocute me for it just the same."

"If course, you didn't kill him, and you couldn't be convicted in a thousand years." I waited a moment, then added, "I have a message from Miss Shafer. She says to tell you that you know what you must do."

I thought he reddened slightly under his tan. "I haven't the remotest idea what she means."

I gave him a long, steady look. "I'm quite certain you do, doctor."

He laughed shortly, bitterly. "One doesn't expect a nurse to have an imagination, much less to use it."

"Shall I tell her you don't know what she means?"

There was a slight pause. He picked up a blotter, held it for a moment, not looking at me. "If you like."

I started to leave. He threw down the blotter and said slowly, "You're mistaken, Alma, if you think that anything Miss Shafer might do would be of any help. But thank you for coming just the same."

I hurried back upstairs, not having made the afternoon rounds as yet, or worked on the charts. The patients were restless. The day which up to now had been fair had turned out to be quite the reverse. A slow drizzle was falling. That meant they'd have to stay in all afternoon, and a hard time for the new nurse and myself.

I suggested that they go out onto the sun porch, and maybe tea and biscuits would be nice, but the suggestion was received in gloomy silence. What use to go out on the sun porch when there's no sun, one of them spoke up at last, in a disgruntled voice.

I gave up.

A little while later I went into Billy's room. While I was there, his mother came in. She was a sweet, gracious woman with violet eyes and blue-black hair. She didn't see me at first and moved toward Billy's bed with a little rush.

I was much surprised at Billy. He said, "Don't kiss me, mother. I don't love you any more. I don't even like you."

"Billy, darling!" his mother cried out in a frenzied voice. "How can you talk to me like this? How can you?"

Billy's young mouth was set in a grim, straight line. He said, between his teeth, "You see, I know about that money—"

I was not prepared for Mrs. Trent's reaction. She threw herself across the bed, sobbing wildly. "But you didn't kill him. Tell me you didn't, Billy. Tell me!"

The boy drew away from her, pale but unmoved. I went over and tried to lift up the woman. "Mrs. Trent, you must get hold of yourself. This is not good for Billy, you know."

The woman sat up, dabbing her eyes with a wisp of lace and linen. "I didn't know you were in here, Mrs. Toland. I'm sorry." I led her to a chair, and she continued to sob softly. "He's my only son. All I have in the world. I know he's spoiled. He has a bad temper, but I know he couldn't have . . . he couldn't have—"

"Of course not. Now do try to be quiet, Mrs. Trent. This is very bad for both of you."

I saw that Billy was looking at me with angry eyes. "Alma, my mother is not responsible for what she says. Please try to remember that, won't you?" In spite of the anger in his eyes, his voice was pleading.

"Of course, Billy. And I think she had better go now and come back when you both feel better." To my relief the woman acquiesced. I led her to the door, where I found Peter Kruger. Had he heard it all? And where was Lydia Featherstone? She should have been in on this, too. But, of course, with the door opened, she could probably have heard anyway.

I stepped back into Billy's room and thrust a thermometer into his mouth. He didn't have any fever, which was surprising. He demanded his clothes. I told him that just because he was clear of fever didn't mean he was ready to be discharged. We'd have to wait until Dr. Proster said he was ready to leave.

Billy lay back sullenly on his pillows. I went out to find Peter Kruger waiting for me. We walked silently down to my office, and once there, the detective said, "So Billy's mother thinks he may have killed Dr. Bettis?"

"I wouldn't pay a bit of attention to that." I sat down behind my desk, wishing I could get to some of my work. But Peter Kruger had just started. "What's the matter with Billy, anyway?"

"I think for one thing he has a . . . a sort of persecution complex."

"I never saw a healthier specimen of boyhood in my life," the detective came back at me with asperity.

I had to admit that. "But, nevertheless, he has fever at intervals, and it goes rather high. Started from a common cold."

Peter Kruger ran his fingers through his hair, and then suddenly realizing what he was doing, gave his head two or three quick pats, and slumped a little in his chair. "These doctors, Bettis and Proster, did postgraduate work in Vienna, prior to the war, of course. There had been another doctor associated with them, a smallish man with an awful lot of thick black hair, which grew rather low over his forehead. Not a bit handsome, I must admit. Name is Claus Berow. Ever know him?"

I shook my head. "I just knew there was another doctor associated with them. I supposed he was in the army."

Peter Kruger went on to say he'd also checked up on Alicia's story while reading old newspaper files in the library and newspaper office. She had been traveling with her aunt and uncle in Mexico. There'd been an automobile accident, and these two people had been killed. Alicia had narrowly escaped death and had to stay in a Mexico City hospital for a long time.

That was the way it was told to us; that Alicia had suffered head wounds and there were still scars, some just above her ears, one on her nose, and other small ones, all of which would disappear in time.

When I explained this to him, he asked about Dr. Proster. Could he have been jealous of Carl Bettis and the fact that he made an awful lot of money?

I didn't think so. Dr. Proster made a lot of money, too.

Peter Kruger then asked if Mrs. Trent ever had been a patient at Resthaven? He thought, that she may have had some kind of mental malady of which Dr. Bettis had cured her. It was plainly evident that she had paid Bettis a very handsome sum, fifty thousand dollars, which Billy evidently resented. "Whenever I try to talk to him," Peter Kruger went on, "he shuts up like a clam."

I told him that Billy had admitted that his mother was not responsible for the things she did.

Peter said again that Dr. Bettis and Dr. Forsythe had quarreled the night Bettis was killed. He added that they had been quarreling about money.

"Alan Forsythe didn't kill Carl Bettis."

"Who did then. Did you?"

I said, "No," but there were times when I cheerfully could have.

Peter Kruger then asked if in my opinion Forsythe and Bettis were interested in the same girl.

"Alicia?" I asked.

"No, Marie Shafer."

I smiled. "What does Mrs. Featherbrain say?"

He grinned wryly. "She says the spirits tell her there's a definite love triangle involved."

"She would."

He started to run his fingers through his hair, remembered in time and put his hands in his lap. 'Sometimes I think this is the kind of case that only a screwball can solve."

There were two things I suppose I should have told him. One thing, the voice I'd

heard down in the basement, or thought I'd heard. But I had no proof I'd actually heard it. I'd been tired, nervous. The detective would have dismissed it with another one of those looks, "as-a-nurse-you-should-be-an-inmate-yourself." As for Jane Dowdell's gorilla—if I so much as mentioned this, he'd probably have me in a straight jacket. Instead I said, "Are you going to arrest Alan Forsythe? You'll be making a serious mistake if you do."

He got up, walked restlessly about the room for a moment. When he stopped, he said, "I want the staff to come down in the study on the first floor at eight o'clock. I won't keep you long." He stopped, went on, "And in answer to that question in your eyes. No, I don't expect to find anybody who knows anything. I'm not as optimistic as that."

After he left, I felt a little better. I didn't believe he'd arrest Alan today. That was something.

IV.

We were all down there promptly at the hour. Believe it or not, Peter Kruger asked the same old questions he'd been asking before. Did anybody know anyone in the hospital or outside who hated Dr. Bettis sufficiently to kill him? Did Dr. Bettis ever treat Mrs. Trent for a mental ailment? Did anyone know why Billy Trent disliked him? Or for that matter, both the doctors in the hospital?

Dr. Proster spoke suavely. Said Mrs. Trent had not been treated by Dr. Bettis at any time and that Billy's prejudices were purely from a sense of frustration because he had to remain in the hospital for some time.

"Was Dr. Bettis sentimentally attached to Miss Shafer?" Peter Kruger had hardly asked the question before Marie Shafer appeared. I never had seen her look lovelier. She wore an informal dinner frock of light-blue chiffon, trimmed in an intricate pattern of seed pearls, with long sleeves and a softly draped bodice. Her hair was done in an upsweep with a cluster of curls over her forehead. I was ready to say that Marie Shafer was completely recovered. I was even more ready to say so when I heard her speak, standing there tall and graceful before Peter Kruger.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," she began quietly, "but I must tell you that Dr. Forsythe couldn't have killed Dr. Bettis. He was with me, or, rather, I was with him in the cottage at the time established for the murder." She had colored a little, but went on, interrupting Alan who had started to speak, "I don't expect you to believe me, but the fact is I have frequently left my room by way of the terrace on nights I couldn't sleep, and once or twice, Dr. Forsythe has been walking around the grounds and has invited me into his cottage for a chat and a mild drink."

Peter Kruger's eyes met her without a flicker.

Alan started to speak again, his face tense, but the detective interrupted him. "Don't worry. I'm not accepting an alibi like that, coming from a woman in such a . . . in a hospital like this."

I sat there stunned. Then it didn't matter that Marie Shafer was as sane as either you or I, nothing she said would be taken as evidence.

Marie turned and walked gracefully from the room. The rest of us soon followed. I said as we walked to my office. "She's telling the truth. She's not insane."

"She's in love. That's a sort of insanity, you know." His voice was grim.

We had reached my office by now. "Are you referring to Dr. Forsythe?" I asked.

Peter Kruger nodded. He sat down, began looking in his pockets for a cigarette. I took out a package from my desk drawer, tossed it to him.

"If you ask me, I think Marie Shafer is completely cured."

Peter had his cigarette going, leaned back in the chair. "Any romantic angles before she came?"

"I think not. She's never mentioned anything of the kind."

"All the more reason why she'd fall like a ton of bricks when she did fall."

"It's hard for me to believe she's in love with Alan. I wish I could believe it. I would give anything to know it's true."

"Well, you've got your wish. Read this." He drew a note from his wallet, where he kept the few small clues he'd been able to find.

The note was written on delicately tinted paper, the kind I knew Marie Shafer used. But I sat there not opening it. Somehow, I couldn't.

Peter Kruger looked at me grimly. "This is murder, Mrs. Toland." He meant, of course, that any means were justifiable in

order to get at facts. Finally, I opened the note:

Alan, dearest, Doctor B. is doing everything he can to separate us. Can't you do something to stop him? I didn't want to tell you, but he wants to marry me. He is so determined about it, he frightens me. Is there any way you can make him understand that I don't want to see him again, not even as a physician? Tell him the truth; that we are going to be married just as soon as I'm certain I am well.

Yours always,
Marie.

"Satisfied?" Peter Kruger asked, watching me grimly.

"Satisfied and delighted."

"Don't you see that this note strengthens the case against this doctor? If, as it now appears, Dr. Bettis was killed because of this letter, wouldn't it be natural for Miss Shafer to try to give the man she loves an alibi, even if it means that she must tell things that are a bit on the . . . er . . . shady side?"

"I think," I answered, after a short silence, "that the situation is just a little too melodramatic *not* to be true."

To which Peter Kruger replied, with a flicker of a smile, "One should learn never to expect logic from a woman."

This masculine attitude always infuriates me. But I choked back my feelings. We talked over a few other things, some of the other patients, Mr. Beecher, the heart block case in 60, whom Lydia Featherstone insisted was the murderer. "It's always the ones who can't leave their beds, you know," she'd said, at which we'd made our escapes.

We talked about Billy again, and about Dr. Proster.

"Any emotional entanglements? Dr. Proster, I mean."

I told him I didn't know Dr. Proster very well. I did know that he wasn't married, however. He was a good doctor, even though he was much inclined to flatter all his patients, but most of them seemed to like it.

Peter Kruger got up, flexed his muscles sort of like a cat. "It's a bottleneck. Anybody in the hospital could be guilty. And what have I? Nothing more than a love angle. Jealousy, perhaps, but personally I think it smells."

He started to the door then, said he was going to talk to Billy again and this time he was going to make that young man sing. He was back in half a minute with news. Billy was gone.

Billy had evidently left in his pajamas, for the doctor had instructed all the nurses not to let him have his clothes.

Peter Kruger didn't believe he could have got very far. But a careful search of the grounds with flashlights proved that he'd made a clean getaway.

Dr. Proster had notified the police immediately.

This must have been about nine-thirty. Jane and I had arranged to split the night watch again, but with things happening as they were, I decided we'd both better stay on the job. Never had I had a better hunch.

About eleven, Peter Kruger came back from helping in the search for Billy and showed me a key. "Look, Alma"—yes, he was calling me by my first name now also, as practically everybody did—"this boy Peewee. Know where you can find him?"

Peewee had a tiny alcove room in the nurses' dormitory. I could go over there and wake him up, if it were important enough.

Evidently it was. Peter Kruger handed me the key. "It's to the basement room. I snitched it from Otha's key ring while behind him outside on the grounds. Dr. Proster told him to go on looking until he'd found Billy, so he won't be back for some time. I want you and Peewee to go down and go over this basement chamber thoroughly. I don't have much hope that you'll find Billy, but whether he's there or not, give the place a once-over."

I don't mind admitting that I didn't like this last assignment. And I was disgusted with myself for not wanting to go down there alone. But I must admit that as we started down the stairs, Peewee's sturdy presence was a comfort.

I opened the door noiselessly and switched on a light. The room as Peewee had said was full of queer-looking instruments, which in the dim ceiling light gave the room a weird appearance. I had a feeling that almost anything could happen here.

The ceiling light was high and dim and dirty and there were dark shadows in the corners of the long room. I looked around, hoping to find a switch that would turn on one of the large lamps over the instruments, while Peewee began exploring the corners.

I had just located one of the switches when Peewee gave a loud explosive, "Whee! Mis' Alma, look! A ghost!"

"Peewee, for heaven's sake, not so loud." I turned on one of the large lamps then and saw what had frightened the boy, who by now was standing beside me, clutching

my arm. Something stood in a far corner, something tall and slender, which may have been a body covered with a heavy white cloth.

Could it be Billy, hiding?

I started toward it, but Peewee held my arm tighter. "A lot of help you turned out to be," I grumbled. "Come on."

Peewee followed with reluctance. We went over to the figure. I took hold of the white cloth, gave it a quick yank.

Both Peewee and I gasped. It was Alicia. Or rather what we thought was Alicia. Instead, getting more courage and examining it more closely, we found it to be a wax figure of Alicia wearing a long, flowing nightgown.

We were still standing there staring at it when the lights went out.

Peewee gave another, "Whee!" Somehow we managed by stumbling around to reach the door.

Once upstairs we both had a good laugh. Peewee went back to bed. I went up to the third floor, drawn compellingly to Alicia's room.

She was sitting up in bed, calmly reading a book.

"Your light should have been out hours ago," I reproached with a smile.

"Is it midnight yet?"

I looked at my watch. "It's twenty-two minutes past." Had Peewee and I been down in the basement only that short length of time. It seemed hours.

Alicia said, "I'm not going to sleep, Alma. Haven't there been times when you wanted to stay awake?" There was a high, nervous note in her voice.

"I don't think I ever had enough sleep in my life."

"But I'm not going to sleep, Alma," Alicia repeated stubbornly.

"I'll stay with you. I'll stretch out on your nice chaise longue," I coaxed

"No." Alicia's voice was still stubborn, but two big tears suddenly slid out from the corners of her eyes. "I can't go to sleep. I mustn't—"

I thought it wiser to change the subject. "That's a lovely book you have there. How did the page happen to be torn?"

She smiled faintly. "I had a tantrum."

"But you're too big to have tantrums and damage such a handsome book."

Alicia smiled again, her eyes thoughtful. "I got a spanking for it. You see, I was only seven."

"Maybe I'd better give you a spanking to make you go to sleep."

Two little dimples suddenly came out of hiding in her cheeks. "Alma, you try so hard to be hard-boiled, but you're not at all. You're really sweet." She stopped and it seemed as though her face grew suddenly tense and pale. "I wish you'd go to bed. I'm quite all right. I'm not a bit afraid now. Honestly."

I picked up the book, which she had let fall from her fingers and ran through the pages. It was a child's book and a very expensive one.

Alicia was past seventeen. I started to put the book back on the bed beside her when I saw a name written on the flyleaf in a child's hand. "This is Maida Vaile's book."

Maida Vaile. Who was she? Another cousin?

"You see, Alma"—Alicia was speaking again with an effort—"I really am not afraid any more. She . . . she's coming back tonight. And I . . . I'm going with her."

Had her mind lapsed again? I looked up and was surprised to see Dr. Proster standing beside the bed, looking down at her sadly. "Poor child! I thought she was getting better."

He motioned me to come outside. "Alicia is in a rather bad way. Give her a grain of luminal, another half grain, if necessary. And you or Jane Dowdell stay with her tonight."

He needn't have told me that. I'd already made up my mind not to leave her.

He started out the door, turned back, and said in his slow voice that Billy hadn't been found yet, but that they would surely find him by morning. "He can't have gone very far in his pajamas, you know."

V.

I WENT back to Alicia's bed to find her wide awake as before. "Dr. Proster says you must have something to make you sleep."

"No, Alma, no!" she cried in a frenzied voice.

"Then, darling, will you lie very quietly and keep your eyes closed?" I didn't mention the word sleep, but, of course, that was what I was hoping for.

Alicia said stubbornly. "Yes, I'll lie still."

I smoothed her pillows. "How about a cup of hot cocoa?" This was one of Alicia's weaknesses. "I have some whipped cream."

"That would be nice, Alma."

I hurried out, asked Jane to make the cocoa, and hurried back.

"Did you see Otha?" Alicia asked. "Maybe he would come to see me now because—" She stopped.

When I saw she had no intention of going on, I said soothingly, "It's late. Otha's in bed. Maybe he'll come tomorrow."

"But tomorrow, don't you see, may be too late?"

Jane brought the cocoa. Alicia finished it with relish. After which I settled her back on her pillows and she made a valiant effort to keep her eyes open. But it wasn't long before she was asleep.

I slid the chaise longue closer to the French windows; took up my vigil. I knew there was a strange woman in this; she'd been on the grounds;! she'd been on the terrace. She had also been at the grave of Dr. Bettis. She might very likely appear on the terrace again, in accordance with Alicia's story. If she should come, then I felt sure I could fit all the pieces together of this weird, bizarre tangle.

I hadn't long to wait before I heard a soft footstep. I sat up, alert in every nerve, feeling a little shivery, I must admit.

Someone was out there. Then a shadow fell before the window, faint, illusory, then taking shape into the figure of a woman.

It was then that I made a serious mistake. I turned on the light on the small table beside me. I caught only one brief glimpse of a white face and fever-haunted eyes. She was gone immediately.

I had frightened her away. If I could only stop her. I stepped quickly onto the terrace and ran down the long outside stairs. But the woman seemed to have been completely swallowed up in the darkness. The stillness of the night, the unruffled dignity of the tall trees seemed to mock me.

And then I thought I saw or heard a movement in the shrubbery. I moved a few feet nearer. The next thing the earth seemed to fly up and hit me.

It was Alan Forsythe who found me and who dressed the wound on the back of my head. Not being able to sleep, he'd gone out on the grounds to smoke. And Marie Shafer must have been around somewhere, too, for I remember hearing her sweet, clear voice asking if I had been seriously hurt.

Then I heard something else which may, or may not have been a dream. Another wild, piercing scream, the same voice I'd heard before. It could only belong to Marie. Had I dreamed that she'd been screaming again? I couldn't be sure.

Things became vague after that. Perhaps Alan had given me something to dull the pain from the wound on my head and they must have put me to bed in my dormitory room. I may have slept an hour or so. Maybe longer.

Anyhow, at sometime near morning, I awakened and knew someone was in my room. I could hear the sound of stealthy breathing and a faint movement. Even more than these physical evidences, I could feel a presence. I lay perfectly still for a moment, my body feeling stiff and painful from such a strained position. It suddenly came to me that Jane or someone from the hospital wanted something in my room, and was trying not to wake me.

I did a foolhardy thing. I reached up, pulled the brass chain of my lamp and said, "Who is it? What do you want?"

A slow voice answered from a dark corner of the room. "That is very nice, Alma. I wasn't exactly sure where the bed was. You make a very good target."

I recognized the voice, but refused to believe my ears. I raised my head. "Is . . . is it Dr. Proster? Do you want me for something?"

I saw him then more distinctly, standing just in front of the open window. He held a revolver in his hand, which he was leveling at me. "You are . . . going to . . . kill me?" I cried through chattering teeth.

"Yes. You've interfered too much with affairs at Resthaven. I hope you've said your prayers tonight."

"I think you must be crazy!" I cried, sitting up straighter.

He said in the same slow, quiet voice, "Much better to lie still. I shall aim at your heart. You have a rather nice face, you know." He stopped, then added grimly, "I'll do the job right this time."

"Put that revolver down!" I cried. "You don't know what you're doing—"

I heard the loud report of a shot then and fell back on my pillows.

Well, to make a long story short, I thought I'd been shot. I lay there with my eyes tightly closed, wondering how long it would take me to die. Putting my hand to my heart, I found it pumping away. I felt of my head and the rest of my anatomy with quick, short pats. My hands encountered no blood. I drew a long breath and there was no pain.

After another careful investigation, I came to the conclusion that to all intents and purposes I was going to encumber the earth for a long while yet to come.

I heard a voice coming from the window. "Take him in, boys." Then someone stepped lightly over the sill. Had Proster come back to finish the job he'd bungled twice? Then the voice again. "It's Kruger, Alma. You all right?"

"I may be all right, but I'll never look the same." I reached for a dressing gown. "It was Dr. Proster. He wanted to kill me."

"Yes, I know. Been trailing him for an hour."

"But he did shoot me. Why aren't I dead?"

"I was just in time to deflect the shot; threw his arm up. The shot hit the ceiling."

I looked at my watch; saw it was four-thirty. "I'll get dressed, if you'll wait outside. Charlie opens early. Maybe we can get some coffee. I could do with some."

"I bet you could. You're pretty game, Alma."

"You're not so bad yourself. But I fully expected to die of fright, even if I hadn't been shot."

Charlie was putting on his apron when we came in and the coffee was bubbling in the urn. The aroma was heavenly. I sank down onto a bench in one of the booths. "Certainly was a wild night."

Peter Kruger nodded. I waited until I'd swallowed some coffee before I spoke again. "Dr. Proster . . . did he do it all?"

"Yes."

I took another sip, then lifted my cup and drank half the coffee, hoping Charlie would be able to fill it up for me again. "Did you find Billy?"

"He's all right. I went to his mother and made her come across. There's nothing wrong with Billy, never has been. But he'll soon be drafted. And his mother—well, you should guess."

"She paid Proster fifty thousand dollars to keep him in the hospital, and he's been giving him something now and then to induce fever, just to make it look right?" My mind was now running on all six. Why had I been so stupid as not to have suspected something like this?

"Not Proster, Bettis. That was one of the things they quarreled about."

"I thought it was Alan who quarreled with Bettis."

"It was. He found out some of the shady deals that were going on and put in his resignation. But Alan knew too much. It would have been dangerous to have let him go. So that's why Proster went to such infinite pains to incriminate Forsythe. He used his surgical scissors to kill Bettis with, hid them in the ravine, knowing they would eventually be found. Of course, Proster had all the time in the world to come from his apartment during the night, stab Bettis and leave without being seen."

Peter Kruger then said that Billy had joined up immediately.

"In his pajamas?" I asked dumbly.

"Billy was smart. One of his friends was waiting for him with a suit of clothes. Billy was horribly distressed and embarrassed because his mother was trying to keep him from being drafted."

"I can see that he would be." I added that I was glad Billy was man enough to want to fight for his country.

"He left while we were all down in the study. The recruiting station was still open, so it's all fixed."

Well, it was clear enough now when it came to Billy. But there were still other things that were far from clear.

I looked at Peter Kruger. "It was Proster who hit me? It must have been, because he said he was going to finish the job when I found him in my room with the gun."

He nodded, picked up his cup and finished the coffee, and there wasn't any more, so we thought we might as well go back.

Walking across the grounds, I suddenly remembered something else. "Just before that blow on my head, or maybe even afterward, I thought I heard someone scream. Was it Marie?"

"Yes, Alma. There was another tragedy. Miss Shafer stumbled over the body of a woman. The woman you'd told me about. She's an artist and her name is Marilyn Vaile. Or rather her name was. Dr. Proster killed her in the same way he tried to kill you the first time. By a blow on the back of her head at the base of the brain. She was Alicia's mother."

We had reached the hospital now and there was no time for further talk. Both Lora and Jane Dowdell were coming toward me. "Alma, you're really all right?"—this from Jane.

Lora said, her lower lip shaking, "We thought you were dead. Most everybody else is."

Jane Dowdell turned on her. "Nonsense! Nobody's dead but Dr. Bettis."

"And that . . . woman and Dr. Proster," Lora maintained. We went on to work then.

For once all the patients were sleeping. Even Lydia Featherstone, for which thanks be.

Otha was sitting in the corridor looking as if he hadn't slept for a month and yet there was a strangely different look on his face, too. I saw that he was again sitting where he could keep his eyes on Alicia's door. Alicia who was really Maida and not Alicia at all. And that was a long story, the tangled ends of which I'd not yet been able to knit up. All in good time, I hoped.

What I meant to say about Otha's face was that the pale, worried expression was gone. I had a feeling that he might even smile now, and made a mental note to come back as soon as I had time to see if I were right.

I worked at my desk until seven; then Jane Dowdell and I snatched a few bites of breakfast. While we were finishing, Peewee came in, his hair, as usual, standing up in two little horns in the center of his head. He said, "Miz' Cooper, I mean Miz' Toland, didn't we see Alicia's stature in the basement?"

"Sure, Peewee. Why?"

" 'Cause it ain't—I mean it's not there now. Kruger went and looked, and it's gone. He won't believe it was there."

"I'll tell him," I promised.

At seven fifty-seven, lights began flashing for breakfast. I sent Lora to Lydia Featherstone's room, telling her to walk in with the tray and walk right out. I didn't doubt but that she'd be called back for questioning. Or maybe the woman's familiar spirits were on the job and she wouldn't need to ask questions.

I took Alicia's tray in myself and got the surprise of my life to find Otha sitting there beside her actually smiling. And I mean smiling.

Alicia said, "Alma, I'm so sorry you were hurt."

"A mere bagatelle. Don't even mention it." I added flippantly, "It takes a lot to kill me, you know."

I wished I hadn't said that for immediately a spasm of pain crossed Alicia's face. Otha reached over and took her hand. She smiled at him gently. I went out and left them together.

A few pieces were fitting themselves together in this jigsaw puzzle, but just how Otha fitted in was more than I could figure out at present.

At ten o'clock I had a breathing spell. I'd been going around so hard and fast that I was feeling a little dizzy. I was sitting at my desk with my head between my hands when Jane popped in. "Did you get any sleep last night?" I asked.

"You first told me to stay up; then you told me to go to bed. In the face of such contradictory instructions, I just sorta hung around."

"You would," I smiled.

"You've got to go back to bed now, Alma," she insisted.

I was saved from argument by the entrance of Peter Kruger. He had news. He'd found the wax figure. Most of it had been burned in the furnace.

"What was it for?" I questioned.

Peter sat down, squinting his eyes slightly. "I believe I have the straight of it, although it's a rather involved story. Alicia's story, I mean."

Jane broke in. "Wait a minute. Is Proster really dead?"

He nodded. "He had some kind of deadly poison concealed about him. Had it in readiness, I suppose, in case his sins ever caught up with him. He was dead five minutes after taking it."

"How did Lora know?" I wondered.

There was a sort of gleam in Jane's eyes. "She says Featherstone told her."

Peter gave a start. "That screwball!"

We let it go at that. Peter Kruger went on then, said that Dr. Proster was a man who'd stop at nothing to turn a dishonest penny. He wanted money, was determined to have it. Dr. Bettis wanted money for the same reason a miser wants it. To gloat over. Both of them had been getting substantial sums from the I. G. Farben interests, who were only too glad to advance the money for their chemical experiments, but that was changed when the war started. So they both turned to other ways to make up the deficit.

These experiments were expensive. They had to pay the family of the patient they experimented on a lot of hush money, and induced them to give their consent by holding out a promise of recovery.

"What were they trying to do to Alicia?" Jane broke in.

"Her case was different, although they were experimenting just the same." Peter drew a long breath, went on, "You see, the real Alicia Brownell died in that motor accident in Mexico. Alicia's guardian, another uncle, didn't dare face the probate

court. He'd been speculating with Alicia's fortune, had lost quite a lot of it. He came to Proster with his trouble. Proster's scheme was to substitute another girl for the real Alicia. The world was filled with fragile blond girls around seventeen. But in the end, it was Maida Vaile, Dr. Bettis' daughter by his divorced wife, Marilyn Vaile, who was in Europe trying desperately to get home, who was elected to take Alicia Brownell's place. Dr. Bettis took his daughter out of college and brought her here. By the use of plastic surgery, she was made to look as much like Alicia Brownell as possible, a wax figure of the real Alicia being used as a model."

"Did Alicia, I mean Maida, know that Carl Bettis was her father?"

Peter Kruger shook his head. "She hadn't seen him since a small child. When she was first brought here and the operations performed on her face and body, she was kept more or less under narcotics. Then later, she was given a serum, perfected by Proster and his associate, which destroys the memory cells. They had only tried it once or twice before on some of their charity patients, who may have died before results could be known. In Maida's case, it worked only partially, because the girl fought against it."

I couldn't help thinking that Carl Bettis was a most unnatural father. Then I remembered—I'd seen Maida in his arms. Had his paternal affection awakened at last, and he'd wanted to call it off with Proster, and Proster had refused? Was that what he'd wanted to tell me, the truth as to Maida's identity?

Peter Kruger was talking again. "Then Maida's mother got back Finding the girl gone, she may have suspected at once that she was here. She probably still loved her handsome ex-husband, whom she had divorced because of his lack of scruples in regard to getting money, and had taken her own name back and given it to her child. She probably came here to demand the child and was in some way frightened away."

Once again my mind was working on all six cylinders. "She did come here, was frightened by someone in the basement, was told they'd stop at nothing, not even murder. I heard someone saying that while I was down in the basement. I think I understand now how it must have happened. This woman must have been in the padded room, the door slightly open. Just as those words were said, it was closed."

Peter Kruger nodded. "That's very possible. I know that Mrs. Vaile was afraid to come and demand the girl boldly. Afraid it might cause something to happen to Maida. But evidently Mrs. Vaile knew about this serum, suspected that it was being used in order to confuse the girl's mind and cause her to forget her identity, a mother's instinct maybe. So she went to work to counteract the work of this serum. She'd probably made several visits to the terrace, disguised in old clothes, where she would tell Maida through the blinds that she must think, and keep trying to remember something like that."

How right he was. I remembered that slip of paper I'd found in Maida's hand. "Think, you can remember!" It was the sort of thing a mother would do.

"That was how we found the crimson clay on the terrace," Peter resumed. "Mrs. Vaile had evidently meant to put it in the girl's room, because it was associated in some tangible way with her childhood. But she was evidently frightened away from the terrace and dropped the clay there."

I knew he was right again, though I didn't understand exactly how he'd figured it all out. I said, "And the soap bubble, of course."

I hadn't mentioned this, so I explained about it now. Peter Kruger said no doubt that soap bubbles were something else that had been happily associated with Maida's childhood, which the mother hoped would help her to remember. Mrs. Vaile, no doubt, had blown it through the open slats of the Venetian blinds.

"Then, of course, the child's picture book," I went on. "That did make her remember. For she told me that she'd had a tantrum and torn the page and had been spanked for it. Then she said she wasn't afraid any more; that the woman would come for her and she would go with her." I suddenly remembered that Dr. Proster had come in then. He'd heard Alicia had gone out and laid in wait for the girl's mother and had killed her.

"Dr. Proster was clever, but not clever enough." Peter Kruger was squinting again. "He arranged that these two girls, supposed to be Maida's cousins, would come often. They went through their act like little monkeys. Then, of course, there was Otha."

I sat up straight. "That was really the cleverest thing Proster did," Peter said. "Otha and Maida had been friends, sort of kid sweethearts. It was really a stroke of

genius on Proster's part to get someone Maida really had known and have him constantly deny that he knew her. In order to do this, he had to get something on Otha to hold as a whip over him. He evidently found what he needed at once. Otha's father, Otto Wagner, a first generation German, had deserted the German army and had come to this country to stay. We still have the long arm of the Gestapo in this country. No doubt Proster knew some of them. He must have had contacts from his association with I. G. Farben, the German chemical combine. So Proster could hold the threat of turning his father over to the Gestapo over Otha, and keep him here for the purpose of confusing Maida's mind all the more. It was diabolic." He stopped, lighted a cigarette. "Now we come to Alan Forsythe. When he found out some of the things that were going on, he resigned as I've said. This happened the night Bettis was stabbed. Proster knew that Miss Shafer was in love with Forsythe. He wanted her himself, or rather he wanted the control of her money."

"Proster?" Jane and I echoed at the same time.

Peter Kruger nodded. "When I found it was Proster who had been annoying Miss Shafer, I found my first real clue. You see, this note Miss Shafer wrote to Dr. Forsythe in which she asked him to make this Doctor B understand that she didn't want to see him again, not even as a physician, had been tampered with." He waited a moment while Jane and I both stared at him. "This initial B originally had been P. Peewee had taken this note to Dr. Forsythe's cottage and left it there. During Forsythe's absence, Proster must have gone to the cottage, probably seeking something over there by which he could further incriminate Forsythe. What more did he need than this note? He simply took a pen and changed the initial P to B with one downward stroke. Naturally, we thought it was Bettis who was annoying Miss Shafer. But there was a slight difference in the color of the ink Proster used to change this initial, so slight that it can only be seen under a microscope." He rose then. "I believe that's all."

But Jane Dowdell interposed. "What about the gorilla?"

Evidently, she'd spoken of this to Peter Kruger before. There was the faint beginning of crinkles around his eyes. "Your gorilla was just poor Doc Claus Berow. He's the one associated with the other two doctors in making the experiments. He stays in the basement because he's a victim of elephantiasis on his face and hands. Not being tall, with his hair growing rather low on his forehead and this horribly disfiguring disease, I can easily see how anyone seeing him at a distance might think—"

"But I thought he was in the army," I put in.

"That's what you were supposed to think. He's been living down there for six months with Otha to bring him food and wait on him. He probably ventured out now and then at night, for something he needed during Otha's absence, and was seen once by Miss Dowdell and once by Miss Shafer." He said then, his voice full of sympathy, "He's such an awful looking sight, gorilla is a very good name, I'm afraid."

After Peter Kruger was gone, I looked at Jane to find her looking at me. "Let's join up with the army and help win the war," she said, and added, "That is, if you don't think I'm too old and crusty for the government to give me a job as a nurse."

"Nonsense! You're just the kind they need. If they won't take you, we'll organize a nurse's corps of our own." I slipped my arm around her then and gave her a hug. Jane is a good old scout and I love her.

TELL 'EM, PAGLIACCIO!—*Continued from page* 32

It was almost dawn, but what was that to a man who'd been told by the boss to sleep as late as he wanted to sleep. And who'd been given a ten-buck advance on an increased wage and had spent it all. Scotch wasn't bad stuff, after all, although it took a lot of it.

Whitey was with him, and Whitey had tried Scotch, too. Whitey asked, "Who's this P-Pally-achoo you're yowlin' about, Pop?"

"A clown, like me, Whitey. Di' I tell you Tepperman's gonna let me ride Lil in th' parade, in clown cos-coschume?"

"Only fifty times you told me."

"Oh," said Pop, and his voice boomed out again.

"Change into humor all this sor-row unspoken—"

A beautiful sentiment, no doubt, but not quite true. He hadn't been happier in fifty years.

WHERE THERE'S SMOKE—

By ETHEL LE COMPTE

It was only a faint imprint on a pillow, but it was the damning impression that told the chief all he wanted to know—

"Is this the chief? . . . Jed Reed speaking. I'm at the P-Parsons' p-place—"

"Well, don't stutter about it."

"You'd stutter, too, if you—"

"All right! What's the story?"

"When I came to deliver the milk I heard Mrs. Parsons calling for help, so I busted on in—the back door was unlocked. I found her tied to a chair in the kitchen. While I was getting her loose, she told me that two men had broke in during the night, beat her up and shot her husband and—"

"Call Doc Winslow to come right over. I'm on my way—"

As he sped along the State highway in the police car that warm June morning, Chief Somers went over in his mind the little he knew about Henry Parsons and his pretty young wife.

They had come to Herndon about two years ago, stayed at the inn until they'd found a house they liked. It was a small bungalow in a remote part of town, on the cliff overlooking the river. The owner of the bungalow took a liking to Parsons and got him a job in the local lumber mill, where he had worked steadily ever since.

The couple had had no social life to speak of. They made no friends, joined no church. They merely passed the time of day with their neighbors, the Greens, who lived in the other house on the block. The Parsons went out seldom, and then only to the local movies.

In short, the chief summed up, they lived for each other. He shrank away from the task ahead of him. Mrs. Parsons would be about out of her mind with grief. He'd seen her with Parsons, noticed the adoring way she looked at him, hung onto his every word.

Leaving the highway, Somers turned into Cliff Road, passed the Green house, a vacant lot, then parked in front of the Parsons' bungalow. There was only Dr. Winslow's car there. Jed had gone and that annoyed Somers considerably. He hadn't thought it necessary to tell the youth to stay there.

As he opened the front door, the chief heard a woman's loud, uncontrolled sobs. Hard-bitten as he was, he felt his sympathy go out to her.

"Parsons is dead then," he said to Dr. Winslow as he came out of the room where Mrs. Parsons was and shut the door.

"Yes, shot in the head while he was still asleep. She's taking it terribly hard. I've put her to bed in the spare room. I didn't give her a sedative because I knew you'd want to question her, but don't you think that could wait, Somers? The poor girl is almost at the end of her rope."

"It won't be a pleasant job, but I've got to question her and you know it. Where'd Jed go to? You should have kept him here."

"Murder or no murder, milk has to be delivered. I warned him not to tell a soul about this affair and to come right back."

"I'll take a look at the body."

The chief followed the doctor into the living room, which, he noticed, was in perfect order, through a hall and into the bedroom.

The still form of Henry Parsons lay on the left side of the double bed. There was a small wound in his right temple and blood from it had stained the pillow. His face looked quite calm, and there was no sign of struggle. The bedclothes had been thrown back from the right side of the bed, where Mrs. Parsons had slept. She had used two pillows. Her husband, one.

"Maybe she's trying to cover up his suicide," the chief said. "I'll look for a gun."

"It could easily be suicide," agreed Dr. Winslow, "but not likely. They were a devoted couple, lived too simply to have money troubles."

While the chief went about his search, he asked, "You found the top drawer open like this, doc?"

"Haven't touched a thing except the body."

Chief Somers opened the closet door and gave a grunt.

"Find the gun?" asked the doctor.

"Gun? No. Reckon the suicide hunch is wrong anyway."

"I thought so myself right along. Finished?"

"Here, yes. Gosh, that woman's crying is getting on my nerves."

"Then talk to her right away, and I'll give her something to quiet her—make her sleep, perhaps."

"I've got to search the house first, doc."

"Doing things a little bit backward, aren't you?"

"Maybe. Go tell her to take it easy. Please, doc."

Somers followed the doctor out of the room after a slight delay. He made a thorough search of the house. When he came up from the cellar, Dr. Winslow asked sarcastically, "Did you expect to find a clue in the furnace? You're slightly sooty, old gumshoe."

"Well, here comes Jed at last," growled Chief Somers, ignoring the unnecessary sarcasm. Striding out onto the back porch, he asked the young milkman why he hadn't waited.

"I should let the babies starve," Jed defended his action, "and get myself a calldown from their mothers. Anyway, you don't need me to help you solve the crime, do you, chief?"

"You know I don't, wise guy. Have you told anyone of the murder, anyone at all?"

"Of course not. Doc told me not to."

"Did you take anything away from this house when you went?"

"What you getting at, chief? I'm no thief."

"I know that, Jed. Answer me."

"I didn't take nothing . . . anything"—sullenly.

"What time was it when you first heard Mrs. Parsons screaming? Cripes, I wish she'd shut up now!"

"She wasn't screaming, chief. Just calling for help."

"What time was it?"—impatiently.

"About five. I leave the farm about four-thirty. Takes them damn' horses forever to get anywhere. When I had the truck, I did it in ten minutes to Green's, my first stop."

"Anyone awake at Green's when you stopped there?"

"Didn't see or hear anyone."

"Come on inside."

"Do I have to? Loran's screaming drives me nuts."

"What do you think it does to me?" Somers went inside, followed by the reluctant Jed. They went directly to the kitchen where they found Dr. Winslow.

"Jed, you found Mrs. Parsons tied up at about five, you say. You didn't call me until five-thirty. Why the delay?"

"I was untying her and trying to calm her after she found out that Mr. Parsons was dead."

"O.K. Did you break in the front door or the back door?"

"I told you I came in the back way. The door was unlocked. Trying to get me balled up?"

"Don't get funny, Jed. Did she explain why the door was unlocked?"

"No. Never mentioned it. Know something? I guess the murderers got in and got out that way."

"I'll do the guessing around here, my boy. Go on with your story."

"Well, there was Loran . . . er . . . Mrs. Parsons tied to the chair by the gas range. There was a smell of gas. She told me they'd turned on the gas to suffocate her, but she'd wiggled around and turned it off. See, here's where I cut the ropes offen her." Jed kicked the ropes that still lay on the floor and mopped his face with his handkerchief.

"Take it easy, son," Chief Somers advised. "You've got more of the same coming up before I'm through with you. Then you'll have the county officials. Say, what did Loran have on?"

"Just a housecoat. Pink, with a lot of lace in front."

"Hm-m-m. Rumpled much?"

"I didn't look that close, chief"—flushing.

"Hair in curlers?"

"No, sir! She's got the swellest permanent on my route and she's a natural blonde, real fussy about her hair."

"Jeeps!" exploded Dr. Winslow. "Chatting about a woman's hair and night apparel when a man's been murdered!"

"Keep your shirt on, doc," soothed the chief.

"Still in my pajamas, damn it."

"You can go home any minute now, doc. I think Jed here has the makings of a sleuth the way he notices details and stuff."

Jed straightened up and gave the doctor a triumphant glance. "After I cut her loose," he went on in an easier tone, "I carried her into the living room. She clung to me,

crying something awful, poor kid. I tried to quiet her and then when I asks her where was Mr. Parsons, she fainted. I got water to throw on her, but she came around without it and told me two men had come into the bedroom and shot her husband and dragged her out into the kitchen and—"

"Strangers?"

"She didn't say. Naturally, I took it that they was."

"Might have been fellows from the city with an old grudge," put in the doctor wisely.

"So they might," agreed the chief dryly. "Did you go in to see Parsons, Jed?"

"She asked me to, so's to be sure he was really dead." Jed shuddered. "I could of used a drink right then."

"Friendly with Mrs. Parsons, calling her Loran, eh, Jed?"

"Well, it's this way, chief. She's been giving me grammar lessons. I come back here after my milk's delivered for an hour or so every day. If gas and tires wasn't rationed, I'd have more time. Them . . . those old horses—"

"More time for love-making, you mean, Jed?" cut in the chief.

"Fine way to talk about a lady," said the doctor angrily.

"You got me wrong, chief," was Jed's indignant denial. "You know I'm going steady with Jennie Phillips."

"That's so. Sit out on the back porch and pull yourself together. I'll call you if I want you. I'll phone the coroner, doc, to have the body moved to the undertakers'. No use upsetting Mrs. Parsons any more than necessary. You got the pill to quiet her, doc? She can screech louder'n my parrot." Somers opened the door of the other bedroom.

Loran Parsons lay face down on the bed, but held her head sidewise so that her cries were not muffled.

"There, there, Mrs. Parsons," soothed the chief. "I'll not pester you much, but I know you want to help me find the murderers who killed your husband in cold blood. Did you know them?"

"Stop . . . stop saying those awful words!" screamed Loran Parsons.

"You ought to know better than to talk like that to her," growled Dr. Winslow.

"But her husband was murdered. Please answer my question."

"Of course, I didn't know the men! And don't use that word."

"Sorry," murmured the chief. He sat down on the edge of the bed, and took the woman's hands in his. "My dear child, don't think I'm here to torture you. I must do my duty and you must do yours by helping me bring the murderers to justice. You want vengeance, don't you, Loran?"

"No! What good would vengeance or anything else do me now that Harry is dead?" Loran sat up suddenly. "Just leave me alone."

"I will as soon as you tell me exactly what happened."

After a few moments, Loran began, in a slow, unsteady voice, "I was asleep. Something woke me up with a start. I heard footsteps in the living room, and shook Harry. But before I could wake him up, a hand was over my mouth and— Oh, Harry! Harry!"

"A hand was over your mouth," prompted Chief Somers.

"Then a rag was stuffed in my mouth and my hands were tied and I was carried out to the kitchen by one of the men. He was foreign-looking and—"

"Was it light enough to see what he looked like?"

"He switched on the light. I got just one look at him before I heard a shot— Oh, Harry! Harry!"

"You fainted?"

"I must have. When I came to, I was tied to the chair. I smelled gas and managed to turn it off, then I got the rag out of my mouth and presently I heard Jed's horses and I called to him."

"I see. Poor girl"—gruffly. "Just another question or two then doc'll give you some sleeping stuff. Was the man young, tall, thin or what? Describe him as best you can, please."

"He was fairly young, medium height and rather thin. He wore a dark suit, tan oxfords and had a felt hat pulled way down over his face. Oh, yes, he had a mustache."

"I see," Somers commented dryly.

Loran covered her convulsed, tear-stained face with her hands.

"Do you ever wear any expensive jewelry, Mrs. Parsons?"

"Only this engagement ring." She held out her left hand.

"If they'd have been after that, they'd have taken it," put in Dr. Winslow. "But the bureau drawer was open, chief."

"Maybe they didn't know where Henry worked and thought he earned a large salary and we'd have money in the house. As a matter of fact, I did have nearly a hundred dollars in the top drawer."

"Then they've taken that," drawled the chief. "Why did you faint when you heard the shot, Mrs. Parsons?"

"What woman wouldn't faint when her husband was being shot?"

"It might have been your husband shooting the intruder."

"Oh, no. We've never owned a gun."

"Well, that's all and thank you. Now, try to be brave, Loran. I see you're surprised I know your name. Jed used it, so I thought you wouldn't mind an old man using it. By the way, do you wish to see the body before the undertaker—"

"Oh, no! No! Please, do I have to?"

"Of course not, child," murmured the doctor, glaring at Somers. "Here, drink this and you'll go to sleep."

"Any woman friend or neighbor you want to stay here with you, Loran?"

"No. I don't know any of the neighbors."

After Somers had made the two necessary phone calls, one to the coroner, the other to the undertaker, he went out to Jed, who was sprawled in the swing on the back porch. "Get me a pint of milk, please son," he said, sitting down in the swing.

He drank the milk from the bottle. "That was good, even if it wasn't coffee," he said. "Did you see a strange car or strangers on foot as you came along the highway to Cliff Road?"

"Nope. Guess they'd have been gone by the time I came along."

"That's so. They must have known the lay o' the land to pick this house to rob. Dead-end road with a cliff and the river in back," he went on as if thinking aloud, but his eyes didn't leave Jed's face. "Nice place to live, with this view, though. Suppose the Parsonses thought of that and not of the isolation. Pretty garden they've made. Neat housekeeper, too." He went into the kitchen with the empty milk bottle and put it down on the clean white tablecloth covering a table in the sunny dinette.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated, snatching up the bottle. "Look at the dirty ring the bottle made." He snatched off the cloth and took it to the sink. After he had washed out the stain, he took the cloth down to the clothesline at the far end of the Parsons' lot only a few feet from the cliff and carefully hung it up.

"Why didn't you give me the bottle and save all that?" asked Jed, the empty bottle in his hand. "Look, I gotta go. My old man'll be stewing in his own grease if I don't get back to the farm and get my chores done."

"Run along, Jed, but don't leave the farm until I phone you to come back here or to the station house."

"Good grief, chief, you don't think I done . . . did it, do you?"

"Course not! Get going, son." The chief gave the young man an encouraging pat on his broad back. Then he went in to the phone and called the station and ordered the man on duty to come right over to the Parson's place.

"She's asleep, poor girl," Dr. Winslow reported. "I've patients to see today," he added impatiently.

"Why, of course, doc. If you'll just wait here until the undertaker or my man gets here, I'll be much obliged. I have an important errand. Like to do it before I call in the prosecutor."

"You have a clue?"

"I'll say so!"

"Good luck. I'd like you to get your handcuffs on the miscreants, chief. You sure get ahead of the county authorities plenty often."

The two old friends exchanged grins, their first that morning.

A short while later Chief Somers was on the river road, staring up at the white tablecloth he had hung close to the cliff's edge. He knew that the Parsons' house could not be seen from below so had put the cloth there as a guide that would limit the area he had to search.

Nevertheless, it was three long hours before he came back to the Parsons' bungalow. To his surprise, he found both Dr. Winslow and Jed there with Sergeant Smith. "What you two come back for?" he growled.

"I wanted to see how Mrs. Parsons was," the doctor answered. Then he asked eagerly, "Any luck, chief? You been gone long enough and—"

"And what you doing here, Jed?" the chief cut into the doctor's remark to demand. "Private business with Loran?"

"Heck, no. Just wanted to ease your mind about me running away."

"You just try taking a run-out on me," snarled Chief Somers.

"Your gentle mood shows that you got off on a false scent," murmured the doctor, unable to hide his disappointment.

"Mrs. Parsons asleep, doc?" asked the chief.

"She is."

"Wake her up then. And don't look at me as if I were poison. I got a nasty job to do, men, but believe me, it's got to be done."

The chief waited a few minutes, then went in to see Mrs. Parsons. At sight of him, she burst into hysterical sobbing.

"That won't help you any," the chief told her firmly. "Loran Parsons, you are under arrest for the murder of Harry Parsons."

Loran shrieked wildly, then fell back, unconscious.

"This time," said Dr. Winslow, "you're wrong, chief. Now get the heck out of here and let me take care of her."

Jed, behind the doctor, cried, "She wouldn't hurt a fly, chief."

"But she did kill Harry Parsons"—with absolute conviction.

Loran looked very fragile and grief-stricken and helpless as she sat in Somers' private office with him and the prosecutor, but her feminity was wasted on them.

"I've got the goods on you, Mrs. Parsons," said the chief. "It will save you a lot of trouble if you'll confess."

"You must be crazy," murmured Loran, tears streaming down her face, which was devoid of make-up. "I loved Harry with all my heart. I swear it!"

The chief cleared his throat, aware of the doubtful looks of the prosecutor. The darn woman did sound sincere, but—

"You shot him, nevertheless, Mrs. Parsons," he said. "With this!" He whipped a tiny revolver out of the desk drawer and thrust it in front of the young woman's face.

She drew back shuddering, and cried out that she had never seen the thing before. "Make him leave me alone," she begged the prosecutor.

"You've nothing to fear if you are innocent," the prosecutor told her quietly.

"This gun," said the chief in a low, steady voice, "lay in its nest last night. When I lifted your top pillow I found on the under pillow the imprint of a gun. The damning impression is still there, Loran—"

"Easy enough for you to drop the gun onto the pillow and say—"

"I have not been in that room alone, or with anyone since I found this gun. Besides, I've other convicting evidence. After you shot Harry, you tied yourself to a kitchen chair and—"

"I did not! Jed can tell you how I was tied!"

"Exactly the answer I wanted you to give me, Loran. When Jed found you, you were wearing a pretty pink housecoat and you had put it on purposely. You knew the young, impressionable milkman you'd been flattering by giving him grammar lessons, would be the one who'd find you. You wanted to distract his attention from the clumsy knots you'd tied. This"—from the drawer he took a plain muslin nightgown—"is what you wore in bed. I found it hanging on your closet door. There's a tiny speck of blood on it, but that's enough."

Loran Parsons jumped to her feet. "Framing me, eh? Small-town stuff. I won't bother to deny—"

"Sit down," Chief Somers ordered sharply. "Even with that tablecloth to guide me, it took me three solid hours to find this revolver," he complained. "When you threw it over the cliff, Loran, you should have made sure it went into the river."

"This is fantastic and outrageous!" screamed Loran. "I demand—"

"And I know why you killed the man you were living with. You didn't want him to go back to his wife. You spoke the truth, perhaps, when you said you loved him. You'd rather have him dead, than have him leave you, for her."

The woman was on her feet again. "I loved him too much to give him a moment's pain," she gritted. "He loved me as much—"

"You saw to it that he didn't have a moment's pain. He died instantly and by your hand. He loved you, yes, but he grew tired of you and the caged life he led here with you, longed for the fine home and wife you'd lured him away from, longed for his son—"

"When you dream up stuff you do a good job," Loran shouted, on her feet now, and rushing for the door.

From the desk drawer the chief took a third object. "In this envelope are the charred bits of the letter Mrs. Doris Parsons wrote her husband telling him how happy she was he had come to his senses and intended to come back to her and their son. You found it in his pocket yesterday or last night. You tried to burn it after you'd murdered him.

"It's always a mistake to light a furnace fire on a hot June morning, Loran, and an even greater mistake to let it go out—before it burns up a letter like this. Odd how much smoke a few papers make," he remarked conversationally to the prosecutor.

"Pile up your crazy exhibits," sneered Loran. "I'll take my chance with a jury."

"There are many women on juries now, Loran," murmured the chief. "Jed's about the only young male not in service, hereabouts. Still want to take your chance with a jury?"

"No, I— All right, I did it. But she'll not have him back. Neither will I go on trial." She lifted the revolver from the desk.

"You don't think I'd let it lie there loaded, do you?" drawled Chief Somers calmly and took the tiny revolver from her.

Then he mopped his head. What a jam he'd have been in if she had pulled that trigger!

PETE GARLAND'S WIDOW

By JAMES M. ROSS

The ways of the underworld are strange and they take care of their own in life as well as in death.

FIFI WEYLER, Pete Garland's girl, swept from the car Pete had given her as a birthday present. She entered the apartment house lobby and hurried to the elevator, knowing Pete would be upstairs waiting for her.

It was after midnight. A queer time for Fifi to be out and alone. But she had gone to Brooklyn to leave food and clothing for a family who had been kind to her when she first came to New York, a family upon whose neck King Hard Luck had fastened his sharpest claws.

Fifi was anxious to tell Pete about her visit. She moved down the hall toward her apartment, humming a song she had sung when she had thought a stage career was to be hers.

At the turn she stopped, dumfounded. A man's figure was sprawled across her doorway. A queerly shaped mass of blackish fluid was smeared all about the prone figure. A sickly arid odor made the atmosphere almost intolerable.

Fifi's world crashed around her then. She knew intuitively that this grotesque thing was all that was left to her of Pete. She stumbled to the body.

"Pete's been killed. Oh, my God!" But it was not in supplication to the Deity that her wail was projected.

"Pete, Pete! You can't be dead! Wake up! Long enough to tell me who did this."

But Pete would never open his eyes nor move again. Nor would he ever again hold in his arms this exotic blonde, who had all the love his heart could give her.

Yes, Pete Garland was dead. A hole split one eyebrow. Blood still oozed from the spot.

The grim remains had a crumpled appearance, as if they had been torn and flung away. The reason for this came out when the medical examiner viewed what had been Pete. The racket chief's frame had been demolished by close and serious attention from a Tommy-gun. Seventeen bullets subsequently were dug out of Pete.

Police and detectives soon were swarming over everything in Fifi's place. They asked many questions, some of them appearing to Fifi to be unnecessary. The officers seemed a trifle bored. Now and then one gave tongue to a wish that these gangsters would rub each other out so that honest criminals and cops could get back into their routine.

Stir was necessary now, however. A "reform" district attorney had just come into office and was like the fabled new broom. And Garland was a long-range gun, no small caliber.

Clues to the slayer were absent. Few murderers, even "executioners," write out a confession, sign it with correct name and address, with a cross to show where the body was left, and pin the document in an exposed place. Pete's tornadoes were as helpless as the regular investigators. The killer certainly had spewed bullets from close to his own breastbone.

Joe Spadella had pulled trigger on Pete. Getting into and out of the apartment house had been easy, following adequate oiling of a janitor's hand.

Joe had sent Tony Turin to get Pete out of Fifi's apartment. Joe had inside information which would have put Tony in the electric chair. Therefore, Tony did his bidding whenever Joe spoke. Tony went up when no one was looking and called to Pete in a voice closely resembling that of Horse Mozelle, who rather neighed when excited. This was one thing Joe could not do.

Tony got Pete to the door and steamed for the open skylight far upstairs. Howeverhe heard Joe's machine gun stutter and a scramble of feet. Tony didn't want to see anybody just then, so he hid behind a chimney until Joe flitted past like a wraith.

Everybody in their set attended ornate covering of the more ornate casket.

Marks of violence were soon cleared from Fifi's vicinity. Certain holes in the door were so skillfully fixed that she never saw them again. She renewed her lease and remained within her castle, prepared for whatever might come her way. Always, though, she walked carefully around one spot when she entered or left her apartment, even when Pete Garland's memory had faded into the limbo of forgotten things, with other people.

Beauty rarely thrives in solitude and surroundings where no gaiety abides. Particularly a gal like Fifi. One's conscience is so likely to slide out of its lurking place like a serpent, coiling about the heart of one who has "done things." So it came to pass that after a few weeks the moth began to flutter a bit at the edge of flame.

Fifi had come from the toothpick zone. There had been a boy at home. But, hell, why should she remember the hick? She did, sometimes, nevertheless, late at night or early in mornings, when the city lay palpitating after a hard day and evening.

Fifi always went about alone, refusing the offers and attentions of any one man. She dined and danced with many. Only a woman or two was ever permitted in her apartment.

Joe Spadella knew that nobody outside his immediate ring thought of him as Pete Garland's killer. He had proof of this in the fact that he was let alone. He was wary for a time when he went outside his own area, but he never slowed up in his going to lively places.

It was inevitable that Joe should see Garland's "widow" frequently. Joe was not impressed by women. He boasted that he knew them too well. He had met Fifi a long time before, when Pete introduced him. That was when he and Pete were as friendly as gang bosses ever are.

Joe fell with a *plop*, though, when Fifi unveiled her eyes at him during a dance. Spadella had a wife, but she was never in evidence.

Spadella's start at love-making was of the knock-down-and-drag-out method. No one dared to tell him so. His trigger finger was never known to be string haltered, as various undertakers and bereaved families could testify.

"Baby, I like you," was Joe's first and fatuous effort. "I want you."

That last was more like Joe. His smoldering black eyes were smokier than usual. His lips seemed thicker than ever over gleaming teeth.

"You're too speedy, Joe," Fifi came back. "But I kind of like it."

"Let me go home with you?"

This was the first time Spadella ever had made such a request. He generally went when and where he pleased.

"You may see me to the door," Fifi granted.

What Joe's reaction was as he approached Fifi's apartment for the first time since his gun had scattered Pete Garland over the floor no one ever knew. But he gave no sign of discomfort as he walked on the very spot where he had torn an enemy's body almost to bits with bullets.

The friendship developed as the weeks passed, but Fifi continued to hold the gangster at arm's length. Joe had grown into the leadership of the mobs, now that Pete was gone, and he figured constantly that he would be sitting satisfactorily when he also had taken over Pete's girl. At times he expressed his amazement at Fifi's reluctance to give him Pete's former place with her.

Tony Turin had not grown along with Joe. Spadella, Tony felt, did not recognize his services as he should. Once or twice, too, Turin had captured a fugitively speculative glance from Joe which made Tony feel as if someone had walked over his grave. Then there was the night when Tony thought he glimpsed the flash of a knife as his back was half turned toward Spadella, but as he recovered from his lightninglike dodge, no blade was visible and Joe was laughing.

Tony began to hate Spadella. His fear lifted its poisonous head by day and by

night. If he didn't look out for himself, who would do it? The answer was plain. Instinct, too, told him to stay away from the cops. Joe's men might be angry, he thought, if he told his story to anybody. They might not know Spadella had killed Garland, but they would protect their boss.

Tony was not brave. One day he wrote Fifi a letter, without signing it. He told her who really had killed Pete, and went sufficiently into detail to prove to Fifi, coupled with what she had picked up herself, that the scribbler knew whereof he wrote.

Fifi read the letter carefully, turned the paper over to scan the other side, but found it as bare as the palm of a hand. Then she read it again, and if her face had seemed cold before, now it was a mask of ice. Carefully, she placed the missive in the hiding place under the hearth tiles where Pete had installed a small safe for her own use. Then she used the telephone.

Fifi had continued her acquaintance with some of Pete's best men, and when an hour after she made her call a tall, middle-aged, loose-jointed man appeared, she greeted him as a valued friend. The visitor was Horse Mozelle. Fifi gave him the anonymous note.

The next morning Fifi had a message which pleased her, if a slight crinkling of her wintry lips was an indication. Mozelle was reporting progress. That evening Joe Spadella was invited to dine with Fifi at her apartment.

Joe arrived early, sprayed with the heavy perfume he believed to be captivating. His smile was more oily than ever. Eyes and lips gloated in anticipation of the victory he felt had come to him.

"Glorious creature!" he said, as he bent over Fifi's hand.

Fifi had donned her best and her neck and fingers gleamed with the jewels Pete had given her.

Dinner over, Joe leaned back in his chair and lighted his cigar, one of the brand favored by the departed Garland. Joe sparred for an opening. Fifi dodged; relented a bit, then drew back. Joe remained confident. There came a knock at the door—not a ring at the bell, a discreet summons.

"Joe. Joe Spadella," a voice called.

Spadella was furious. "I gave orders I was not to be bothered here," he ejaculated.

"Better answer it," Fifi suggested. "Or wait I'll go to the door."

She passed him, leaving a hint of scent, alluring as herself. Opening the panel, she turned.

"Mozelle, one of Pete's old men, is asking for you."

Spadella for a moment forgot his habitual caution. His face expressed bewilderment as he walked across the room. Surely his bodyguard in the car across the street had been satisfied or Mozelle would not have got in.

"Come out here a second, Joe," Mozelle urged.

Spadella hesitated, then stepped outside, and what he saw made him fail to notice that the door behind him closed.

Mozelle stood there, a submachine gun resting on one hip. As Spadella halted, rigid as a man already dead, the devil-typewriter began its chatter. Suddenly the muzzle was elevated and a bullet split Spadella's right eyebrow. The body fell in a sprawl.

The gun spit death until seventeen bullets had found sanctuary in Spadella's torso. A nearly black liquid crept out around the corpse, just as it had when Pete Garland lay on the same spot.

Mozelle sped lightly up the stairs onto the roof, pausing thoughtfully to lock the trapdoor. This might delay the cops a few minutes. Then he made his way quickly over the housetops until he reached a building where a skylight yawned. Mozelle cradled his weapon under his coat and stepped onto a ladder miraculously placed there, walked down to the street—and safety.

Back in the apartment, Fifi called the police. There had been shooting near her door, she told the officers. She was afraid, she confided. Could they send some police officers at once? She didn't want to open the door until they got there. Outside a car filled by men with hard faces coasted softly away.

Her call for help completed, Fifi slowly opened the door and looked. She noted the similarity of the spectacle to another she had witnessed at the same place long before. She studied the split eyebrow and nodded. She did not bother to count the seventeen bullet holes. She knew they were there. She looked at certain disfigurements in the panels, made by lead which had sped through Spadella.

Her eyes glowed like emeralds frozen in their own beauty. She almost smiled.

"Good-by, Pete," she whispered.

THE END

WHY WORRY?

WORRY uses an immense amount of vital force. People who worry not only use up their energy during the day by worrying, but they rob themselves of that greatest of all restoratives, sleep. People who worry can't sleep. They lose their appetite. They often end up by getting really ill. How often have you heard it said, 'I am worried to death!'?

What do you suppose would happen if a person who was putting himself into mental, moral and physical bankruptcy by worrying were to convert all this worry-energy into constructive action? In no time at all he would have accomplished so much that he would have nothing to worry about.

Nothing is more discouraging to a worrying person than to have someone say, 'Oh, don't worry, it will all come out right!'

That is not reassuring at all. The worrying one can't see how it is going to come out all right. But if the men and women who worry could be shown how to overcome the troubles and difficulties that cause worry, they soon would cease wasting their very life-blood in worrying. Instead they would begin devoting their energies to a constructive effort that would gain them freedom from worry for the rest of their lives.

You say that sounds plausible, but can it be done?

It can be done, and is being done, by Pelmanism, every day in the year. This is all the more remarkable because today the whole world is in an upset condition and people are worrying to an unusual extent. Yet, every mail brings letters to the Pelman Institute from grateful Pelmanists who have ceased to worry.

People today are all too prone to complain that they just have to worry. But once they become Pelmanists they cease this negative form of thought.

Personal and Individual

Pelmanists are not left to make the applications themselves. An experienced and sympathetic instructional staff shows them, in exact detail, how to apply the principles of Pelmanism to their own circumstances and aspirations. Thus every Pelman Course is an individual Course.

Over and over again our correspondents say, in effect: 'I feel that this Course was prepared for me, and me only'. Substantially this is so, for the instructional notes and letters of advice are entirely personal to the individual; they are for him or her only.

The Home Front

Time and energy to spend in service that will add to Britain's striking power! That is what we, men and women alike, are seeking now. At the same time our daily work must be done and done well. There is a proved way of organising time and conserving energy so that both daily work and public service will be well within the measure of our strength.

Every thought must be clear and definite, every word have its meaning, every act be stripped of any movement that wastes energy. All that is not essential to the proper carrying out of our daily work must be eliminated so that our strength will be greater for the intense effort that each one of us is anxious to make in that particular war work that lies near to our hands.

The demand from each of us is for quickened perceptive faculties, sounder judgment, greater decisiveness, prompter action, and all the courage and resolution we can muster in ourselves and inspire in others.

The Pelman Institute has, for over 40 years, been training men and women in these directions.

H.M. FORCES

All serving members are now entitled to receive the complete Pelman Course, with full tuition and guidance at

One-half Usual Fee

Immediate application should be made for Special Enrolment Form (Services).

The present dominant aim for every man and woman must be to show a courageous, confident, well-equipped mental front. This assured, then all else will be achieved, and the world has no more proven method than Pelmanism to attain this end.

Pelmanism is quite easy and simple to follow. It takes up only a short time daily. The books are printed in a handy 'pocket size', so that you can study them when travelling, or in odd moments during the day.

The Pelman Course is fully described in a book entitled *The Science of Success*. The Course is simple and interesting and takes up very little time; you can enrol on the most convenient terms. The book will be sent you, gratis and post free, on application to:

Pelman Institute

(Established over 40 years)

210 Albion House, New Oxford St., London, W.C.1

Readers who can call at the Institute will be welcomed.

PELMAN (OVERSEAS) INSTITUTES: NEW YORK, 271 North Avenue, New Rochelle. MELBOURNE, 396 Flinders Lane. JOHANNESBURG, P.O. Box 4928. DURBAN, Natal Bank Chambers, P.O. Box 1489. DELHI, 10 Alipore Road. CALCUTTA 102 Clive Street.

Join the Well-Paid Ranks of the TRAINED MEN

MANY THOUSANDS MORE ARE URGENTLY NEEDED. PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A BETTER POSITION AND BETTER PAY.

Ambitious men everywhere have succeeded through I.C.S. Home-Study Courses. So also can you.

We offer you the benefit of our 53 years' matchless experience as the creative pioneers of postal instruction.

If you need technical training, our advice on any matter concerning your work and your career is yours for the asking—free and without obligation. Let us send you full information about I.C.S. Training in the subject in which you are specially interested. DON'T DELAY. Make "ACTION" your watchword.

The successful man DOES to-day what the failure INTENDS doing to-morrow. Write to us TO-DAY.

The I.C.S. offer Courses of Instruction in a wide range of subjects, including :

Accountancy
Advertising
Aero Engine Fitting
Aero Fitting and Rigging
Aeronautical Engineering
Aeroplane Designing
Air-Conditioning
Architecture
Architectural Drawing
Auditing
Boiler Engineering
Book-keeping
Building Construction
Building Contracting
Business Training
Business Management
Cabinet Making
Carpentry
Chemical Engineering
Civil Engineering
Clerk of Works
Colliery Management
Colliery Overman
Commercial Art
Concrete Engineering
Cost Accountancy
Cotton Manufacturing
Diesel Engineering
Draughtsmanship
Drawing Office Practice
Electrical Engineering
Engineering Charge
Eng. Shop Practice
Fire Engineering
Fitting and Turning
Forgeman
Foundry Work
Garage Management
Gas-Power Design
Ground Engineer
Heating and Ventilating
Hydraulic Engineering
Hydro-Electric
Insurance
Joinery
Journalism
Machine Designing
Machine-Tool Work
Marine Engineering
Mechanical Drawing
Mechanical Engineering
Mine Electrician
Mine Surveying
Mining Engineering
Motor Engineering
Motor Mechanic
Moulding
Office Training
Oil-Power, Electric
Patternmaking
Plastics
Quantity Surveying
Radio Engineering
Radio Servicing
Refrigeration
Sales Management
Salesmanship
Sanitary Engineering
Scientific Management
Secretarial Work
Sheet-Metal Work
Ship Draughtsmanship
Short Story Writing
Smithing and Forging
Steam Power Design
Structural Steelwork
Surveying
Telegraph Engineering
Telephone Engineering
Templating
Textile Designing
Toolmaking
Turner
Welding, Gas & Elec.
Woodworking
Woollen Manufacturing
Works Engineering
Works Management

EXAMINATIONS—
Technical, Professional, Matriculation
(State your Exam. on Coupon for Free Syllabus)

Special Terms for members of H.M. Forces

USE THIS COUPON

(Penny Stamp on Unsealed Envelope)

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS LTD.

Dept. 18, INTERNATIONAL BUILDINGS, KINGSWAY, LONDON, W.C.2

Please send Special Free Syllabus on.....

.....

Name.....

.....Age.....

Address.....

.....

.....

I.C.S.

Published by The Atlas Publishing and Distributing Co. Ltd., 18 Bride Lane, London, E.C.4.
Printed by Morrison & Gibb Ltd., London and Edinburgh.
Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Gordon & Gotch (Australasia) Ltd.